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COLOMBIA: EMERGING LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE STATE  
COLOMBIAN DRUG PROBLEM: EFFECT ON THE PEACE  
PROCESS BETWEEN THE M19 AND THE STATE

BY

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REPORT

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## Table of Contents

<u>Report 1</u> Colombia: Emerging Labor Movement.....	1
Cartagena.....	5
Political Setting.....	16
The Economy.....	31
Cartagena Strike.....	41
Portworkers.....	50
State Government's Response.....	57
Conclusion.....	64
Bibliography.....	77
<u>Report 2</u> Colombian Drug Problem.....	83
Violence and Guerrilla Warfare.....	85
Movimiento 19 de Abril - M-19.....	90
Drug Trade Development and Cartels.....	98
Peace and Drugs.....	112
The Colombian Government.....	118
The Colombian Military.....	128
The United States: Friend or Foe?.....	134
Conclusion.....	147
Bibliography.....	150
Vita	

# Index of Tables

## Report 1

Table 1. Vol and val of Coffee exports, 1910-18...	68
Table 2. Growth of Railway (Km) 1885-1909.....	69
Table 3. Fuel (oil/coal) Imports.....	70
Table 4. Major Cartagenian Industries.....	71
Table 5. Cartagena Oil Co..... production rates (monthly), 1912	72
Table 6. Presidential Elections Results..... (under Const. Reforms of 1910)	73
Table 7. Cartagena-based Transport Companies..... 1912	74
Table 8. Cartagenian Businesses and Industries.... 1912	75

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## INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 7 January, 1918 Colombia awoke to the sights and sounds of its first massive labor collective action in the form of the portworkers' strike in the coastal port city of Cartagena. The strike sent the government reeling. The government had recently established itself in a manner befitting the likelihood of developing Colombia into a prosperous nation after decades of devastating political violence. The ongoing 1918 presidential election campaign was tearing at the very fabric of the country. The ruling elite was split into three competing factions: the Conservative party, the Republican coalitionists, and the Liberal party. These different elite factions were seeking voter support in all quarters of Colombian society, including the newly emerging working class.

The government believed that the manipulation of labor by the political factions had the potential of threatening the relatively new stability of Colombia. This possible disruption of the country's stability threaten to hurdle it back into the dark ages of political warfare whence it had just emerged. This

concern of the government was manifested by the violent behavior of the striking workers. The ease with which the workers took to violence alarmed the government. Responding to its own state interests, the Colombian government swooped down on the emerging labor movement, disarming it as a political tool through governmental decrees.

The Cartagena portworkers' strike and the government's response combine into an important event in Colombian contemporary history because they set the state-labor conflict, and its character, into motion. Academic emphasis on this event treat the Cartagena strike as contributing to the development of the Colombian labor movement. Concurrently, it treats the corresponding government action simply as its response to deal only with the Cartagena strike. More significantly, Latin American historians such as Miguel Urrutia and Charles Bergquist place emphasis on the influence of foreign ideologies as being the major cause of the portworkers' strike. These historians attribute the government's response to its fears of Colombia's penetration by foreign ideologies, such as anarcho-sindicalism, which threatened the existing

socio-politico order.

The response of the Colombian state government is central to this study. The interest and emphasis on the nature of the state's response is due to its support of the state's own interests rather than those of the dominant class. The strike presented workers as a group outside of governmental control. The government deemed the workers' collective action as threatening to the country's economy. Additionally, the looming February 1918 presidential election was the first election, after the 1910 constitutional reforms, to have true partisan politics with two main opposing political parties (Liberals and Conservatives). Political manipulation of the portworkers' strike by competing political elite interests threaten the country's political stability. President Concha (Conservative), then president of Colombia, saw the need to rise above elite interests in order to disarm this threat to the nation's stability. Additionally, he saw the need to reduce the workers' potential for creating long-lasting ill effects on the country's socio-politico-economic structure. Concha responded in the only manner that ensured the nation's survival

against this threat and that minimized the disruption of the socio-politico-economic structure of the country. Through a series of presidential and legislative decrees, the government successfully disarmed the emerging working class as a political tool, effectively protecting its own state interests.

## CARTAGENA

Cartagena was founded on the 20th of January 1533 by Pedro de Hereda on the splendid harbour discovered by the Spaniard explorer Bastidas in March 1501. The Spaniards first named the city Calamar, an Indian name, but soon changed it to Cartagena of the Indies because of the resemblance between its harbour and that of the Spanish seaport, Cartagena. The city was important throughout Colombia's history. Cartagena endured a rollercoaster effect in its own history, being the most important city during the colonial period; economic and political decline in the post-independence/republican period; and economic resurgence in the early twentieth century.

During the colonial period Cartagena grew to rival Quito, the seat of Spanish authority in the viceroyalty of Nueva Granada. Cartagena was the single most viable and closest seaport linking the interior of the colony with the Spanish Atlantic trade routes. Merchants traveled from Quito to Cartagena to await the arrival of the Spanish seagoing convoys from Spain. A flurry of business activity occurred with each arrival and



departure of the Spanish convoys. Cartagena profited directly from this activity. Merchants built massive homes and set up business outlets to facilitate their commercial transactions.

Cartagena's harbour was connected to the Magdalena river by way of a canal. This canal was named "El Dique". The Dique was constructed by the Spaniards in 1570, when Philip II was sovereign of Spain, by connecting existing channels and lakes. It afforded the main avenue of transportation between the coast and the Magdalena river until the troublesome times of the wars of independence. El Dique lead from the west bank of the Magdalena river at the riverport town of Calamar to the southern end of the harbour of Cartagena, a total distance of about 85 miles.

Throughout the centuries of its colonial existance Cartagena remained an important and vital Spanish port city. This is evident not only in the fact that most of the international trade of New Granada passed through Cartagena, but also in two other manners. The Spaniards realized the importance of this port city to their trade and sought to protect it. They built massive fortifications and ramparts to protect against

naval attacks. Secondly, Cartagena experienced several attacks from pirates and the navies of other European powers who sought to disrupt Spanish trade during times of inter-European conflicts.

One of the most infamous of these European attacks upon Cartagena was the attack by English Admiral Vernon in 1739. Vernon's attack was ordered by the English Parliament upon learning about Spain's attack on an English ship in the Caribbean sea near Cartagena. This war between England and Spain was called the War of Jenkins' Ear. Captain Jenkins' ear played an important part in the English declaration of war. In 1738 Captain Jenkins and his ship were captured by the Spanish coast guard vessel "La Isabel" off the coast of present-day Colombia. Captain Jenkins was engaged in smuggling contraband out of Cartagena at the time of his capture. Due to the nature of his illicit activities, Captain Jenkins was considered to be a pirate by the Spanish. The captain of the La Isabel ordered one of Jenkins' ears to be cut off so as to identify him to all as a pirate. In 1739 Jenkins appeared before the British Parliament with his ear in hand. The British interpreted the act against Jenkins'

person as an offense against British national honor, declaring war with Spain as a response.<sup>1</sup>

The incessant European conflicts and Spain's impotence in dealing effectively in them, decreased the importance of the legal trade with its colonies. In the Caribbean the Dutch in Curaçao and the British in Jamaica pursued smuggling and illegal trade in and out of Cartagena at the consternation of Spanish authorities. Under the reformist administration of Carlos III, Spain was able to regain its political and commercial might. Spain's renewed strength was quickly challenged by its new world colonies in their quests for independence.

In the wars of independence once again Cartagena played an important and leading role in responding to the call for independence, rising up against Spanish imperialism. The city lead the other nearby provinces of New Granada in fighting the Spaniards. Several of the Colombian leaders who fought under Bolívar, such as Doctors Elías López Tagle and Manuel Rodríguez Torices, came from Cartagena. These Cartagenians were

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<sup>1</sup>. Soledad Acosta de Samper, "Los Piratas de Cartagena", Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico, VII, 9, Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango (1964), 1670-1680.

instrumental in the defeat of Spanish forces at Portobelo and were governors of the province of Cartagena.<sup>2</sup> But the city suffered greatly, too. The Spanish forces inflicted severe damage upon Cartagena. Cannon fire wreak havoc throughout the city, heavily damaging its splendid buildings, businesses, and grand homes. The port facilities were put out of operation but not beyond repair. The city's population was reduced from its pre-independence high of 20,000 to almost one-third of that figure at the end of hostilities.<sup>3</sup> Approximately six thousand Cartagenians were killed, six thousand exiled, and an untold number moved into the interior of the country, never to return again.<sup>4</sup> Cartagena suffered not only from the Spanish attacks but also from the loss of trade and the battles between rival patriot forces. But the city managed to survive and began a short-lived recovery in its role as the country's most important port.

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2. Jose P. Urueta, Cartagena y sus Cercansias (Cartagena, 1912), 416-8.

3. Donaldo Bossa Herazo, Cartagena Independiente: Tradicion y Desarrollo. (Bogota, 1967), 25.

4. Oswaldo Diaz Diaz, La Reconquista Espanola, (Bogota, 1964), ch. I, 45-48.

Cartagena's recovery was stunted because of; the demise of the Dique waterway; the gaining of international trade rights by the port city of Barranquilla and; the building of the Barranquilla-Sabanilla railroad. The combining effects of these three events effected Cartagena's relegation to a city of secondary importance. Occurring at crucial points during the 19th century, these events marked Cartagena's decline. The demise of the Dique waterway was the first event to come into play. During the troublesome times of the wars of independence (1810-21) the Dique fell into disuse and was soon rendered impassable by the accumulation of silt and vegetation. The loss of this vital waterway meant that an overland route had to be utilized in moving goods to and from Cartagena. The Magdalena river comes within ninety five kilometers of Cartagena, whereas Barranquilla is sited on the Magdalena only twenty seven kilometers from the seaport of Sabanilla. The shorter overland route between Barranquilla and Sabanilla gave Barranquilla a significant advantage over Cartagena in that it was less expensive and time consuming to move goods through this route. Thus, Barranquilla attracted

a greater portion of the trade traffic. But in 1824 Cartagena countered the loss of the Dique by successfully petitioning the central government to recognize Cartagena as having exclusive rights to the country's international trade traffic.<sup>5</sup>

The central government acceded to Cartagena's petition. Cartagena had been highly instrumental in the fight for independence, earning the title "Heroic City".<sup>6</sup> Such a city full of courageous compatriots proved difficult to refuse. Yet, by 1842 interior commercial interest managed to persuade the central government to open up more ports to international trade. The driving force behind this need for additional international ports was the costly, in terms of money and time, overland route between Calamar on the Magdalena and Cartagena. In 1842 the central government granted Barranquilla equal rights to international trade.<sup>7</sup> This act was the most significant event that lead to the decline of Cartagena but the coup-de-grace was yet to come.

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5. Diario Oficial, (Bogota, 1824).

6. Urueta, Cartagena, 348-363, 487-8, 591-606.

7. Diario Oficial, (Bogota, 1842).

In 1871 a railroad was built, linking Sabanilla and Barranquilla.<sup>8</sup> The railroad greatly facilitated the overland movement of goods. The railroad ensured Barranquilla's advantage over Cartagena in the movement of goods. Trade traffic increased in Barranquilla and declined in Cartagena. Cartagena was slow in responding to this latest development. And when Cartagena did respond, it was too late. A railroad was built on August 1, 1894, linking Calamar with Cartagena. But overland transportation costs were still substantially higher over those of Barranquilla because of the greater overland distance involved in Cartagena.

Cartagena's railroad failed to sway enough trade traffic from Barranquilla in order to gain added revenues and the status of being the nation's leading port. After all, this inter-portcity rivalry was centered on revenue-earning. International trade was the main source of income for the port cities. Income was earned through tariffs, port facilities fees, and

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<sup>8</sup>. Jose Donisio Araujo. "Compilacion de Documentos Referentes a los Bienes del Departamiento y a otros Asuntos del Ramo de Hacienda", Ramo de Hacienda (Cartagena, 1898), 21-3.

other taxes on the movement of goods. The affiliated commercial interests, such as banks and commercial outlets, brought in additional capital into the cities. Any significant loss of trade traffic caused a direct proportionate loss of income. Although Cartagena remained in the background of Barranquilla's economic rise, it retained the status of departmental capital of Bolivar department. Yet toward the turn of the century even this Cartagenian claim on the seat of Bolivar's departmental government was threatened by Barranquilla. During the Thousand Day Civil War (1898-1902) the governors and administrators of Bolivar moved the seat of departmental government to Barranquilla. Barranquilla's political-strategic importance made it imperative that it be garrisoned and directly controlled by the ruling Conservatives.

Soon after the end of the civil war in 1902, a change of events took place that prevented Cartagena from losing its status as a departmental capital. A Conservative administration, which excluded the defeated Liberals, headed by Gen Reyes took over control of the country. During Reyes' tenure (1904-09) the elites ironed out their differences in order to



come to a new political consensus for governing the country. In 1905 Reyes' administration formed the department of Atlantico with Barranquilla as the departmental capital.<sup>9</sup> This was sort of a jerrymandering Conservative move to place Barranquilla under their control after the end of hostilities. The impetus for this Conservative move to consolidate their control over the coastal urban centers stemmed from the historical secessionistic attitude of these areas.

Although Cartagena remained on the periphery of Colombia's coffee based economic activity, the city began to regain its lost economic strength through innovative industrialization efforts by some of its citizens. The city's major economic activity, trade, was monopolized by a small group of Colombian entrepreneurs and foreign interests, causing excluded Cartagenian entrepreneurs to look elsewhere for economic gain (see Table 7, pg 59). These Cartagenians exploited, to the maximum extent possible, the resources of the surrounding area. Several "firsts" in Colombia occurred at the hands of Cartagenians such as Diego Martinez Camargo. Camargo founded the first

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<sup>9</sup>. Diario Oficial, (Bogota, 1905).

Colombian oil refinery in 1907, under the name of The Cartagena Oil Refining Company. The first major textile factory, shoe factory, and sugar refining plant in Colombia were founded in Cartagena by Cartagenians. Thus Colombia benefitted substantially from the industrial innovations of Cartagena. The country was provided with relatively cheap natively produced products. In this manner Cartagena regained a position of importance significant to that of other Colombian cities such as Medellin and Barranquilla.

### POLITICAL SETTING

The political and economic machinations that generated the problems, which influenced the workers' behavior and the government's response, were set in motion during the 1880's. This chapter does not attempt a complete account of political events during these difficult years. Instead, it focuses on those processes that directly impacted upon the government's reaction to the Cartagena strike of 1918. These processes were: the Liberal Party's efforts toward the reconquest of power and their propensity toward political violence; and the Conservative efforts to maintain a unified republic and control of it. The roots of the competition for political support in all quarters, both old and new, of Colombian society and of a tendency to resort to political violence that underscored the events of January 1918 laid primarily in the Liberal debacle of 1885. But political violence had existed in Colombian politics prior to this Liberal debacle of 1885.

Political violence emerged early in Colombian history. During the 1800s, beginning with the post-independence period, the lack of agreement between the two elite factions prevented Colombia from maintaining the socio-politico stability required for national development. This lack of consensus resulted in periodic outbreaks of political violence and civil wars. Colombian political violence in the 19th century and early 20th century had two main causes. First, the basic differences between the Liberals and the Conservatives, and secondly the behavior of these parties once in power. In the post-independence period Liberals and Conservatives divided over the degree of their commitment to the principles of liberal economy that undergirded the world capitalist system in the nineteenth century and conditioned successful development within it. The Liberals strove to transform land and labor into market commodities that could be combined freely with capital for productive use in a world economy structured by the principles of free trade and international specialization of function

(comparative advantage).<sup>10</sup> Conservatives resisted these attempts at changed from the old order as instituted during the colonial era.

This old order was based on hierarchical authority, a semifudal social structure, and an established Catholic Church with a role in national affairs. Both sides accepted the removal of the Spanish monarchy's rule except that the Conservatives wanted to merely supplant Spanish authority with their own, keeping intact the colonial institutions. On the other hand, Liberals wanted to erase all traces of Spanish rule and its institutions. The Liberals thought that progress was being impeded by archaic economic, social, and intellectual restraints. Conservatives accused Liberals with wanting to substitute Colombia's Spanish heritage, customs, traditions, and Catholic Christianity with inapplicable foreign ideals. At the most basic of levels Conservatives believed that human beings were by nature social and imperfect, disposed to use their abilities badly unless, restrained by tradition and authority;

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<sup>10</sup>. Charles W. Bergquist, Labor in Latin America (Stanford, 1986), 286.

and Liberals, who saw humanity as basically good but corrupted by a society which limited individual freedom.<sup>11</sup> Upon gaining power, each party altered government policies, through constitutional reforms, to the benefit of their interests.

The second cause of political violence was the behavior of the elite factions (Conservatives and Liberals) once in power. Upon gaining governmental power the winning party's first concern was the consolidation of power and to impede the opposition from a resurgence of political power. The techniques most often employed by both parties were constitutional reform and a thorough revampment of the country's political institutions. Constitutional reforms reflected the empowered party's interests and the revamped governmental structure deprived the losing party of any hold it had on the government, effectively excluding this party. The party which won the presidency in presidential elections won all. The Colombian presidency held the power to appoint all the cabinet members, governors of the departments (states),

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<sup>11</sup>. Richard E. Hartwig, Roads to Reason (Pittsburgh, 1983), 57.

and mayors of departmental capital cities. The department governors appointed the mayors of all cities and towns within their respective departments, thus extending the ruling parties power and influence down to the local level. The strength of the presidency allowed the party in power to have a direct and overriding influence in all national and local affairs (only recently have direct local elections been authorized for local mayorships).

The essence of this one-sided rule left the other side totally voided of any significant political power, influence, or say-so in the nation's political and governmental affairs. This political exclusion fostered a tendency for the excluded party to resort to violence in order to force its views, desires, or needs. President Ospina (1857-61) set the precedence of excluding the losing party from participation in the government's administration by not including Liberals in his administration. Up until his election in 1857, the practice of including both parties in the government had been traditionally adhered to by all prior presidents. Ospina's actions caused divisions within both parties. In each political party there

were those who favored the exclusion of the losing party and those who opposed such an exclusion. But most importantly, Ospina's actions directly threatened the Conservatives' hold on power, as the debate over exclusion was bitterly fought within the Conservative party.

The Conservative party was in power most of the 1800s. It allowed the Church privileges and pursued economic and monetary policies bitterly opposed by import-export interests (Liberal interests). The Conservatives lost power for a short period (1857-84) due to intra-party rivalries and division. In 1885 the Conservative Party regained power, thanks to an alliance with the Liberal presidential candidate Rafael Nunez. As a result of an alliance between Liberal Presidential Candidate Rafael Nunez and the Conservative Party plus party division and internal rivalries, the Liberal Party lost control of the government for the next 45 years. The Liberals were virtually excluded from public office by the Conservatives. Upon assuming control the Conservatives restored Church privileges and pursued economic and monetary policies bitterly opposed by import-export



interests.

The change in economic strategy, dramatically at odds with liberal economic orthodoxy in the western world, reversed the direction of nineteenth century Colombia.<sup>12</sup> Tension mounted, and coupled with the Liberals' frustration over their futile efforts at gaining power and the fiscal crisis of the 1890's, led to the inter-party "War of the Thousand Days" (1899-1902), in which more than 100,000 men died, but in which Liberals failed to oust the Conservative regime.<sup>13</sup> An additional indirect effect this civil war was the loss of Panama (1903). The loss of national territory fueled elites' fears of national disintegration, sparking the need for reaching a political consensus through bipartisan efforts.

Only after suffering from politically motivated violence, the loss of Panama, and the country's most costly civil war, did efforts at liberal reform finally overcome conservative resistance. This liberal reform set the Colombian economy into forward motion, an

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<sup>12</sup>. Bergquist, Labor, 295.

<sup>13</sup>. Jorge P. Osterling, Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (New Brunswick, 1987), 175.

expanding economy that contributed to the events of January, 1918. The Reyes dictatorship (1904-09) and the Valencia transitional administration (1909-10) served to politically stabilize Colombian society. It was during the latter's administration that the ground rules were instituted, in the form of the constitutional reform of 1910, that rounded out the stage for the events of January, 1918. But Reyes' administration contributed significantly through reforms it instituted in support of labor and industrial interests.

In attempting to maintain a unified republic and avert further political violence President Reyes resorted to non-partisan reforms. He instituted reforms in labor and protectionist policies. Reyes stabilized the Colombian peso's value by reestablishing it under the gold standard. He founded the Central Bank through Decree No. 47 of 1905 and opened up the country to external credit sources through the Avebury-Holguin Convention of 1905.<sup>14</sup> Along with his monetary policies and reforms, Reyes granted permits to foreign interests, such as the United Fruit Company,

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<sup>14</sup>. Diario Oficial, (Bogota, 1905).

allowing them to set up concerns in Colombia.

Although he allowed foreign interests in, Reyes adopted some industrial protectionist policies. Through Decree No. 15 of 1905 he raised tariffs on imports, excluding imports necessary for industrialization.<sup>15</sup> Law 27 of 1905 gave exclusive rights, and subsidized, Colombian interests in the production of textiles, sugar, and other such products.<sup>16</sup> Reyes was able to put into effect these non-partisan reforms by closing Congress in December 1904 and forming the Nacional Constituency Assembly, an independent government agency, to support his policies. This assembly oversaw the workings the government's agencies, protecting Reyes' efforts. Reyes utilized the National Constituency Assembly to decentralize control of the territorial departments.

During Reyes' administration the state's intervention in the country's economy acquired a new dimension due to the rise of social forces of procapitalistic orientation. The state's economic intervention assumed proportions of modern politics

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15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

with Reyes' policies, causing an industrial proliferation of: textile factories in Bolivar, Atlantico, and Magdalena departments; established oil refinery; canned food factories, of paper and glass; sugar industry; and revival of the country's coffee industry.<sup>17</sup>

Reyes set the ground-work for future petroleum exploration and production when he granted concessions to two of his proteges, De Mares and Barco.<sup>18</sup> Reyes believed that once Colombia became a petroleum exporter, needed foreign exchange could be added to the country's coffers. Due to a serious lack of capital both Colombian entrepreneurs soon turned over their concessions to other developers, mainly Standard Oil Company, through one of its subsidiaries.

The transition from Reyes' administration to partisan politics saw the first substantial political coalition between Liberals and Conservatives. It was not a full bipartisan coalition but one of certain main factions within both parties. These factions formed an

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<sup>17</sup>. Alfredo Carrizosa, El Poder Presidencial en Colombia (Bogota, 1973), 76.

<sup>18</sup>. Donald L. Herman, Democracy in Latin America; Colombia and Venezuela (New York, 1988), 94.

alliance that omitted other factions of their own parties. This coalition took the name of Union Republicana, in deference to its quest to return the country to partisan politics and developing it into a prosperous nation.

Valencia's administration (1909-10) served as the transitional government from Reyes to open elections. Upon assuming control from Reyes in 1909, Valencia called for a National Constitutional Assembly for the purpose of formulating and implementing reforms to the 1886 National Constitution. In 1910 the National Constitutional Assembly convened and wrote into law the constitutional reforms of 1910. These reforms consisted of: prohibition of the issuance of paper money; declared the death penalty unconstitutional; prohibited the reelection of an incumbent president; reestablished the National Congress and the Departments' assemblies; limited the president's powers in making international treaties; eliminated the vice-presidency; declared that the president be elected by direct vote; extended suffrage, based on ability to read and write, have an annual salary of at least \$300 pesos, or own property of at least \$1000 pesos in

value; guaranteed the right to own property.<sup>19</sup> The National Constitutional Assembly then voted Carlos Restrepo (Conservative) to serve as president for the 1910-14 term.

Between 1910 and 1914 both political parties resolved their internal differences and divisions. However, by 1914 the Conservative party had consolidated its political strength, far surpassing the Liberal Party's strength. Vicente Concha, the Conservative presidential candidate, won a landslide victory over the Liberal candidate, Nicolas Esquerro (see Table 6, pg 58). The Liberal Party's weakness stemmed from the fact that a major faction of its membership supported the Republican coalitionists during the election.

Several incidents occurred during Concha's term in office that influenced the events of January 1918 in Cartagena. Concha began his presidency on 7 August 1914, three days after the beginning of World War I. The initial period of the war affected Colombia both politically and economically. Although Colombian

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<sup>19</sup>. Carrizosa, El Poder, 273-4. All monetary figures in this work will be in Colombian pesos unless otherwise noted.

exports did not suffer much, commercial credit dried up and financial institutions recalled outstanding commercial loans. This activity reduced the availability of capital, resulting in a reduction of imports. Since the principal source of government revenues was still custom receipts, the government was forced to employ fiscal austerity measures in order to make ends meet. Concha reduced public employees' salaries and workers' permits, reducing employment opportunities. The reduction in jobs contributed to the 1914 assassination of Rafael Uribe Uribe, the Jefe Maximo of the Liberal Party. Uribe was axed to death in front of the national capitol building by two retired artisans.

What led to Uribe's assassination stemmed from the manner in which Concha organized his administration and its activity. Concha believed that in order to avert political violence and continue the consolidation of Colombia into a unified nation, he had to continue to observe the practice of including Liberals in Conservative administrations, a practice resurrected by Reyes in 1904. Concha named Liberal Aurelio Rueda as Minister of Public Works (Obras). In spite of the

government's reduction of public jobs, salaries, and retirement pay, Rueda increased the number of employees in his ministry. The two retired artisans, angered at the cut in their pay and the biased hiring of Liberals by Rueda, blamed Uribe as being responsible for Rueda's actions and therefore killed Uribe. But the Liberals interpreted the assassination as a Conservative ploy to push the Liberal Party into political disarray by eliminating their leader, a powerful Liberal contender for the presidency. Tension mounted between both parties as each side blamed the other for using Uribe's assassination as political leverage.

In an attempt to appease the Liberals, in 1916 Concha named two additional Liberals to Cabinet posts but without substantially reducing the tensions between both political parties. The assassination of Uribe and Concha's attempts at appeasing the Liberals caused a division within the Conservative Party. The presidential election campaign for the February 1918 elections found a weakened Conservative Party with Marco Fidel Suarez as its candidate, and a strong coalition of dissident Conservatives, remnants of the Republican coalitionists, and the Liberal Party backing Guillermo



Valencia as their candidate. The array of political forces caused heavy competition for voter support in all quarters of Colombian society. The Constitutional reforms of 1910 had opened up the political process to more of the country's citizens (see page 20). The emerging working class, because of the country's renewed economic prosperity, looked promising as a new source of voting power. In view of this new source of voting power/support the Cartagena Portworkers' Strike of January 1918 carried the threat of renewed political violence. The start of 1918 found Colombia poised for battle: an angered Liberal Party preparing for war in case of Conservative attempts to further undermine Liberals' chances of regaining governmental control; a Conservative Party prepositioning troops and war supplies in case of Liberal revolt; an emerging working class which, with the Constitutional reforms of 1910, looked promising as a source of new voter support; and an incumbent Conservative President resolved to keeping the country unified. Such was the political setting at the time of the Cartagena Portworkers' Strike of January 1918.

## THE ECONOMY

Cartagena's own economic resurgence and importance, overall, in the country's economy was due mostly to some of city's entrepreneurs' efforts to diversify its economy through industrialization. More importantly, this chapter draws out the economic elements that formed the country's, and Cartagena's, economic atmosphere and helped set the tone for the events of January 1918. At the time of the strike Colombia was experiencing a quantum leap forward in its coffee based economy. Coffee exports more than doubled from 500,000 kg in 1910 to over 1,800,000 kg in 1918, (see Table 1, pg 53). Gold mining was going strong and looked promising for future mining production. Small manufacturing industries and import concerns sprouted into existence in order to provide for gold and emerald miners' needs. Nevertheless, the main impetus of Colombia's surging economy was coffee.

Colombian coffee exports had grown tremendously from 1910 to 1918 (see Table 1, pg 53). This coffee industry spurred the creation of other industries, which supplied needed products such as textiles and

other manufactured goods to the producers and workers of the coffee, gold, and other mining industries.<sup>20</sup> These needed manufactured goods were lacking because of the negative effects of World War I on imports of such products into Colombia. World War I caused a drastic reduction on the availability of manufactured goods from the developed world. Therefore, Colombian entrepreneurs took to producing their own goods for internal consumption.

The coffee industry was not ruined by the One Thousand Day civil war as many had thought, for the simple reason that the war was fought mostly in eastern Colombia, not in the coffee hillsides of western Colombia. The bulk of coffee production was spared and had only to wait until normal communications were restored. Reyes' administration was highly instrumental in facilitating the growth of the Colombian economy. It undertook an expansion of the railway network, linking up the coffee production areas, river ports, and the coastal ports (see Table 2, pg 54).

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<sup>20</sup>. Bergquist, Labor, 295.

The major ports of activity were the Caribbean ports of Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Santa Marta. The Pacific port of Buenaventura was relatively new. Although located relatively closer to the country's interior, Buenaventura was cut off by the north-south bisecting Cordillera Occidental mountain range. Commercial traffic moved up and down the Magdalena river and, to a lesser extent, the Cauca River. These rivers were the principal lines of communications between Colombia's commercial center and the outside world. The country's major terrain features made travel and movement of goods an excruciating process.

Three major ranges of the Andes, running north to south, divided the country into three distinct regions. The central and immediate eastern regions made up the core of the country. It is in these areas that Colombia was expanding its development of export production, principally coffee. The expansion of the railway network caused reductions in transportation costs in the export of coffee and in the cost in the export of coffee.

The main problem affecting coffee during Reyes' administration was a marked depression of the world

prices of coffee. The most affected country was Brazil, the largest producer of this commodity. Although Colombia was affected at first, it was favored by the fact that its biggest customer, the United States, imported larger quantities of Colombian coffee as a response to Brazil's valorization policies on its coffee exports.<sup>21</sup> These valorization policies were an attempt by Brazil to boost the price of coffee on the world market. This Brazilian attempt to boost the international price of coffee failed. The other coffee producing countries such as Colombia did not support Brazil in its venture. Coffee prices remained low in the international market but Colombia was able to export more coffee because of the United States' purchasing shift from Brazilian coffee to Colombian coffee. The rise in coffee exports to the United States gave the Colombian economy the jumpstart it desperately needed.

Paralleling Colombia's economic resurgence, Cartagena prospered too. Not only did Cartagena economically parallel Colombia, it lead the country

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<sup>21</sup>. Jose Escorcia, Colombia: Economic and Political Aspects in Development (San Diego, 1975), 162.

with a unique and innovative industrialization program. The uniqueness of the city's industrialization laid in it having the first indigenous oil company and refinery. Additionally, there were many industries such as textiles, lime mining, sugar, petro-chemical, among others, in and around the city (see Table 8, pg 60 and Table 4, pg 56). Many of these industries were "firsts" in the country. Cartagena's industrialization was innovative because of its industrialists quest to exploit whatever resources were available, not requiring raw materials from the interior of the country. This was because the transportation costs of such materials cut heavily into any potential profit. Additionally, most Cartagenian entrepreneurs lacked any control or influence on the transportation mechanisms of the area. There were two reasons for this concern. First, the country's transportation net was poorly developed. Large amounts of goods couldn't be transported, allowing for more smaller loads, which compounded transportation costs. Secondly, the transportation companies were owned mostly by a small group of Colombians and foreign interests (see table 7, pg 59). Another aspect of the city's industrialization

that gave it an innovative characteristic was the fact that most of Cartagena's industries and businesses were owned by native Colombians (see table 8, pg 60). This indigenous ownership was the most outstanding difference between Cartagena and Barranquilla's industries and businesses, which were mostly owned by foreign interests. But most importantly, Cartagena was important economically to Colombia because of its revenue producing activity and its oil refinery.

Although Cartagena did not generate as much revenues as Barranquilla, it nevertheless added to the country's coffers. In spite of this revenue-producing port activity, Cartagena's importance was founded in its being the single source of domestically produced petroleum products. Colombia imported finished petroleum products (see Table 3, pg 55), mainly from the United States, but Cartagena's petroleum products were cheaper and not affected by international events such as World War I. Additionally, Cartagena's oil refinery was a vital asset to Colombia's efforts to modernize and industrialize.

At the turn of the century Colombia was seeking to catch up to, and keep pace with, the industrialized

world, mainly the United States and Europe. By this time (1903-4) the United States and Europe were already well into the Second Industrial Revolution. The Second Industrial Revolution marked a new phase of industrialization, in the mid-nineteenth century, evidenced among other things by the growing specialization of production, the beginnings of the direct application of science to industry, and the further development of mass-production techniques.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Colombia had failed to incorporate power generating advances of the First Industrial Revolution during the Nineteenth Century. The First Industrial Revolution was the process by which an agrarian society was transformed into a modern industrial society. The development of improved spinning and weaving machines, James Watts' steam engine, the railway locomotive and the factory system, among other fundamental changes, constituted the Industrial Revolution. Primarily, Colombia's geographical features impeded the country from instituting fully the power generating aspects of

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<sup>22</sup>. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 12  
(Chicago, 1968), 212.



the first industrial revolution.<sup>23</sup> These features were: the isolation of great parts of the country, caused by the three major north-south mountain ranges; and the dependence on one river system as the country's main line of communication.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States had at its very center the application of iron and coal to produce steam power, yet Colombia during the Nineteenth Century largely failed to incorporate these new advances, as witnessed by the limited spread of steam navigation in the inland rivers and railroads; only slightly more successful was the use of steam to power the incipient shops and the handful of factories. It was only in 1890 that Colombia began to install small generating plants; by 1910 all the major cities enjoyed regular electricity service, although in limited amounts.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>. Ibid., 210. The term "Industrial Revolution" was first used to describe England's economic development from 1760 to 1840. It removed large numbers of men and women from agricultural pursuits and introduced them to novel ways of working and living. In so doing, the Industrial Revolution transformed society.

<sup>24</sup>. Rene De La Pedraja, Historia de la Energia en Colombia, 1537-1930 (Bogota, 1985), 1.

Steam navigation in the inland rivers, Magdalena and Cauca Rivers, used wood as a fuel to power the onboard boilers. Wood burned unevenly and thereby was inefficient as a fuel for generating steam power. But because of the difficulty in carrying sufficient coal to power the boilers and the unavailability of coal along the river routes, wood continued to be used. The same problem of nonavailability of coal plagued the railroads. The Colombian railroads at the turn of the century were limited and not interconnecting. There was no system of transportation for the movement of coal to serve these railroads. Therefore the railroad companies continued to use wood as a fuel to power their locomotives. The use of petroleum-derived fuels was a marked aspect of the Second Industrial Revolution. The Colombian government administrators of the early Twentieth Century realized that in order to modernize and industrialize, the country's transportation systems, urban electric systems, and industrial factories had to convert to petroleum fuel-powered power generating mechanisms.

This conversion to petroleum fuel-powered power generating mechanisms made Cartagena's oil refinery all

the more important to the country. The oil refinery provided a substantial portion of the country's finished petroleum needs with an appreciable degree of consistency and at a lower cost than imported petroleum products (see Table 5, pg 57). The portworkers' strike threatened this native petroleum fuel production and the revenue producing port activity of Cartagena. The government could not afford to lose its sole source of natively produced petroleum fuels, on top of a loss of custom receipts and a slowdown in coffee exports. Economically, Cartagena was once again at the focal point of national affairs at the time of the portworkers' strike of January 1918.

### CARTAGENA STRIKE

The Cartagena portworkers' strike was a protest for an increase in basic salaries and for an eight-hour workday. The strike had a precedent in the portworkers' strike of 3 January, 1918 in the coastal port city of Barranquilla, in which the portworkers were successful in reaching their demand for higher daily wages.<sup>25</sup> The Cartagena portworkers' strike occurred on 7-9 January, 1918. Activity began early in the morning of 7 January at the La Machina pier where the portworkers refused to unload the steamer Frutero belonging to the United Fruit Company.<sup>26</sup> The workers further declared that they refused to work unless their daily wages of 70 centavos (Col) were raised to one peso (Col).<sup>27</sup> The workers successfully evaded the pier's Chief Administrator's, Johnny Rodgers, attempts at talking the workers into returning to their duties. The workers abandoned the workplace and returned to

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<sup>25</sup>. El Tiempo, 5 January, 1918. All newspapers cited in this work are Colombian newspapers.

<sup>26</sup>. Eduardo Lemaitre, Historia General de Cartagena, IV (Bogota, 1983), 536.

<sup>27</sup>. La Epoca, 10 January, 1918.

their homes.

By the following morning, on the eight of January, the strike had spread. At 8:30 a.m. the cargo-loaders of the Cartagena - Colmar Railroad gathered at the Aduana Plaza chanting "Strike! Strike!". They unhooked rail cars which were waiting shipment at the La Bodeguita pier. The portworkers at this pier joined the striking workers, unloading the rail cars which contained provisions and food products for the city and surrounding communities.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, at the Boca del Puente bridge a group of approximately 400 workers impeded traffic from the barrios and the city center.<sup>29</sup> At the same time a third group of workers halted work at the Banco Union textile factory, Espriella Hnos textile plant, electric power plant, and at the Taller Americano railroad agency. The strikers managed to convince a majority of workers at these businesses to join the strike. The groups of striking workers joined together, numbering at approximately 2000, and moved toward Manga island rolling up its' businesses' workers in the process.

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<sup>28</sup>. Lemaitre, Historia, 541.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid.

These were workers from businesses such as soapmaking, perfume-making, and hat makers. Finally, printers and typesetters joined the striking workers. What had started out as an isolated strike among portworkers evolved into a general strike.

The strikers, numbering several thousand, congregated at the Plaza de la Proclamacion at 3:00 p.m. that afternoon.<sup>30</sup> Workers made speeches demanding that Governor Dr. Enrique J. Arrazola (a Conservative), governor of Atlantico province, intervene on behalf of the striking workers.<sup>31</sup> General Lacides Segovia, area military commander, attempted to calm things down, asking the strikers to return to their homes while the government attempted to negotiate with the industrialists. The strikers refused to budge. They ignored the general's pleas, refusing to leave until their demands of higher wages and shorter workday were met.

The workers formed a tribunal for representing their demands immediately after the governor conceded to immediate negotiations. Mr. Eutorgio O. Mouthon and

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<sup>30</sup>. La Epoca, 10 January, 1918.

<sup>31</sup>. Lemaitre, Historia, 541.

Dr. Carlos Escallon Miranda (Liberals) headed the tribunal.<sup>32</sup> These individuals praised the public's calm disposition in face of the dire economic situation caused by the strike. The strike threatened to cut off food supplies and disrupt daily life in the area. Most businesses closed their operations during the course of the strike. Yet in spite of this disruption Cartagenians remained calm. The workers' representatives (Mouthon and Escallon) urged the governor and industrialists to reach a quick and equitable agreement to all parties or else suffer great economic losses. After two hours of negotiations an agreement was reached which was acceptable to both sides. The agreement included an eight-hour workday, reduced from the standard nine-hour workday, and the following pay raises: 50 percent increase for salaries of \$1.50 or less, 40 percent increase for salaries of \$1.70 or less, 30 percent increase for salaries of \$1.90 or less, and 25 percent increase for salaries of \$2.00 or above.<sup>33</sup> The negotiating parties made the agreement public and the satisfied strikers returned to

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<sup>32</sup>. La Epoca, 10 January, 1918.

<sup>33</sup>. Lemaitre, Historia, 542.

their homes. The acceptance of the agreement by the striking workers restored calm to the city.

The following morning, 9 January, two incidents occurred which renewed the strike and the accompanying disorder. The work whistle at the Taller Americano sounded work call at 0600 a.m. while workers expected it at 0730 a.m. according to the agreement. Simultaneously, the chief supervisor at the Banco Union textiles factory committed the error of declaring to the workers that he did not have orders to change the workday hours, and that if he were the owner he would close the factory instead of conceding to the conditions set by the labor agreement. The workers flew into an outrage, taking their renewed strike to the center of Cartagena. They met up with Dr. Escallon as he was leaving the Government Palace.<sup>34</sup> The workers pursued Escallon up to the Camellon de los Martires memorial, demanding that he explain to them as to why the government had not upheld its part of the labor agreement. At this point Escallon reiterated his commitment to the workers' cause and guaranteed the government's adherence to the labor agreement's

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<sup>34</sup>. Ibid.



conditions.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, Dr. Escallon warned the workers to refrain from causing public disorder. He further warned the workers that if they persisted in striking and causing public disorder he would be the first to denounce them and abandon their cause. The workers, displeased with Dr. Escallon, at 0930 a.m. massed on the steps of city hall demanding action from the city government. Secretary Franco G. Napoleon read a decree from Mayor Dr. Alejandro Amador y Cortes to the workers.<sup>36</sup> Through this statement the mayor asked the workers to desist from creating public disorder, to return to their homes, and that the agreement was in effect with all its conditions. Additionally he stated that the government was prepared to counteract any new disorders perpetrated by the workers.

Unfortunately, at this same time a picket of soldiers was marching along Portal de los Dulces avenue, heading toward the railroad station with the mission of protecting it from any renegade workers from the previous day's disorders. On seeing the soldiers, the workers believed they were in imminent danger of

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35. Ibid., 543.

36. Ibid.

being assaulted with machineguns. Therefore, they bolted down the city streets to escape a probable death. The strikers broke open sixteen stores, arming themselves with stolen machetes and revolvers.<sup>37</sup> Next, the strikers proceed to run through the streets, hacking doors with the machetes. Some of the rampaging strikers met up with police units stationed between the Cathedral and Bolivar Park. The police intimidated the strikers with their bayonet-fixed rifles, causing some workers to abandon the riot. Others attacked the police. Battles occurred at Portal de los Dulces avenue, La Boca del Puente bridge, and at the Camellon de los Martires memorial.

The battles resulted in numerous deaths including police officer Domingo Guzman.<sup>38</sup> Panic set in in the entire city with all its citizens cowering behind locked doors. Governor Arrazola placed notices at all street corners declaring that the government guaranteed the labor agreement of 8 January, 1918 as an act of justice but that public order must be maintained and observed by all citizens. Failure to do so left no

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37. Ibid.

38. El Espectador, 15 January, 1918.

alternative but swift government action. Order was restored and the labor agreement was strictly enforced.

The workers' rioting and government counteraction occurred due to poor communication between both sides. The labor agreement did not provide a timetable for implementing the conditions of the agreement. Nor did the labor agreement assign anyone the responsibility of informing all involved persons, such as factory supervisors, foremen, shift leaders, of the labor agreement and its conditions. In spite of the workers' disruptive actions the governor backed the labor agreement, giving credence to the sincerity of the government intentions in negotiating with the workers. Although the available information is sketchy at best, it seems that the workers' representatives (Mouthon and Escallon) failed in following through with the implementation of the labor agreement. As representatives it was their responsibility, to the workers, to see through the enforcement of the labor agreement. This failure is evident by the way that these two individuals faded from the scene once the agreement was signed. Additionally, Dr Escallon's actions in attempting to avoided the workers and his

warning to them are indicative of his lack of desire to follow through on his commitment to the workers. The government did more for the workers than their representatives. The workers' representatives' meddling in the strike served simply to aggravate the situation, at the workers' cost.

### PORTWORKERS

There were several socio-politico-economic causes of the strike. Ideology is a common reason given, by sociologists and historians alike, as a leading cause of labor action. Anarchism and socialism were the latest rage in Europe. Portworkers were exposed to these ideologies more so than other workers because of their contact with foreigners at the workplace.<sup>39</sup> Urrutia and Bergquist place heavy emphasis on these ideologies as the main explanation as to why portworkers were the first Colombian working class group to strike. Upon closer examination this argument is found to be lacking in substance. While there is no countering the notion that foreign influences might have played a role, workers' actions did not demonstrate these influences. The portworkers were not organized into trade unions nor were they represented by sociedades as claimed by the historians. Neither did the workers present demands of any significance or sophistication, such as workers'rights, a role in

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<sup>39</sup>. Miguel Urrutia, Development of the Colombian Labor Movement (New Haven, 1969), 57.

management, or a voice in operations.

Economics and politics played a much more substantial and important role than ideologies in the causation of the Cartagena portworkers' strike of 1918. The locale of the portworkers' jobs placed them in an excellent position to monitor the surge in the economy. They could see how well the economy was doing, based on the level of import-export activity. Consequently, they knew that great amounts of profits were being made by the owners of production and the spin-off industries. Portworkers extended these views to workers in other sectors. The portworkers saw these workers in other industries and working sectors as being better off in the sense of better wages, working conditions, and in some cases shorter workdays. Portworkers believed that because of their importance in the transportation net of the Colombian export-based economy, they deserved equal benefit from the new economic prosperity that everyone else seemed to be enjoying. The portworkers realized that the working conditions of their jobs could not be dramatically improved. The technology was not available to make a significant difference in the manner that cargo-

handling was conducted in order to make it easier and safer.

Working conditions in the cargo-handling sector were poor at best. The tough, dangerous process of loading, unloading ships in which loose cargo, a poorly balance load, or carelessly tied knot resulted in accidents, causing this work to be highly hazardous.<sup>40</sup> Current wages did not adequately compensate for the dangerous nature of the work. Although work in this sector was basically lifting, lowering, tying, balancing, and moving loads, it did require skills. Portworkers needed to be skillful in such skills as knowing which load to load first, how to balance loads, securing loads with knots, knots for specific tasks, and priority of loads as far as their sensitivity to environmental conditions and durability. Replacement of such skilled labor was difficult at best. Portworkers knew their strength as a group laid in the scarcity of skilled cargo-handling labor in the vast pool of surplus labor in Colombian society.

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<sup>40</sup>. Andrew Zimbalist, Case Studies on the Labor Process (New York, 1979), 134-9.

A second reason for striking is related to the portworkers' perception of strength as a group due to their critical skills. Before workers set out to strike they must have a sense of high probability of success in the collective action to be undertaken. In the first instance, the portworkers were attuned to the understanding that the country's economic dependence on exports for generating sorely needed foreign exchange for continued development allowed for effective collective action. The Colombian government relied heavily on custom taxes for operating revenues. Any stoppage in foreign trade struck a hard blow at the ruling elite. The ruling elite profited more from foreign trade than any other group/sector. Additionally, the government counted on custom receipts, generated by foreign trade, for operating revenues. Workers knew that in such a situation only two courses of action were available to the government. First, to crush the strike before it gained momentum, or secondly, to gain labor peace quickly through concessions.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>. Hobart A. Spalding, Jr, Organized Labor in Latin America (New York, 1977), 12.



Several factors aided the portworkers along this line of thought. Many export items, bananas for example, needed relatively quick shipment lest they spoil. Secondly, idled ships or rail cars cost exporters money every day. The portworkers believed that the businessmen and industrialists would either settle quickly with the workers or turn to the government for assistance. The portworkers knew that the government had to take into consideration the political ramifications of whichever manner it chose to resolve such a labor dispute. As stated earlier, the workers tended to be highly skilled and knew it was difficult to replace them. They believed that the government was more apt to acceded to their demands rather than to repress them.

Most importantly, however, the fractionalization of the ruling elite greatly influenced the portworkers to strike. Colombia was undergoing a presidential election campaign during the time of the strike. The presidential election was scheduled for in February, 1918.<sup>42</sup> The election included three elite factions: the Conservative party, the Liberal party, and the

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<sup>42</sup>. La Epoca, 10 January, 1918.

Republican coalitionists. Each group was vying for voter support in order to win the election.

The constitutional reforms of 1910 called for universal voting rights based on age, gender, education, property ownership, wages or any combination thereof (see page 20).<sup>43</sup> The new universal voting rights gave Liberals the propensity to look toward the working class as a new potential source of voters. Liberal thinking was that a rise in workers' wages equaled to an increase of workers as voters. If the Liberals were successful in raising wages they stood to incur the workers' loyalty and thereby their votes. The doctors involved on behalf of the striking workers in Cartagena are indicative of this Liberal strategy. This is also evident in the way the workers were able to successfully evade the attempts of Rodgers to dissuade them from rioting and persuade them to return to their duties. The workers displayed a sense of sophistication, or at least preparation, in the ability to successfully engage Rodgers in voicing their demands. This is highly peculiar in light of the fact

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<sup>43</sup>. Alvaro Tirado Mejia, Nueva Historia de Colombia, I (Bogota, 1989), 222.

that these workers had no prior experience in negotiations or collective action, which adds strength to the idea that outside elements had prepared the workers for this type of activity (as Urrutia believes), hence the Liberal party's efforts.<sup>44</sup>

The striking workers displayed an autonomous attitude when it came to the Liberals' manipulation of the workers' relative position of economic disparity for political gains. This attitude came by way of the workers' beliefs that they did not need the Liberals in order to obtain demands. This is evident in the way that the striking workers ignored Dr Escallon's warnings and instructions, renewing their strike with a vengeance, resulting in public disorder. It showed that the workers were not beyond combatting manipulation by outside elements, a good indication of strong worker consciousness. Nevertheless, the Liberal party's manipulation of the portworkers was significant in these workers' decision to strike and carry it to the fullest extent.

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<sup>44</sup>. Urrutia, Colombian Labor, 57.

### STATE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The Colombian government quickly responded to the Cartagena portworkers' strike but not before it was over. Although Governor Arrazola took credit for successfully quelling the strikers' disorders, deliberate government counteraction was practically nil. The employment of the pickett of soldiers and deployed police units occurred by accident. The mission of these forces was to guard against any renegade bands of workers who may not have been satisfied by the labor agreement of 8 January, 1918. Governor Arrazola quickly exploited the resulting action by these government forces as evidence of the government's intolerance toward public disorders.

The national government responded in the manner it did because of political and economic reasons. Its economic dependence on exports for generating revenues made it practically impossible to tolerate lengthy and recurring strikes in its ports. More importantly, the political manipulation of labor had unleashed a new potentially politically powerful group whose violent behavior was outside of everyone's control. This

violent behavior presented a new viable threat to the economic prosperity and stability of the country. The government realized it was not enough simply to break the strike. It believed it needed significantly to limit workers' potential for causing long-lasting ill effects on the country's structure through their inclination toward violent collective action.

The portworkers' strike presented a difficult dilemma to the government. A response of repression carried the threat of disaster for the government. Loss of revenues, labor support for the Liberal party, and lack of replacement portworkers faced the government if it undertook this course of action. Concessions to labor presented just as serious a problem as repression. This course of action had the potential of renewing political warfare. The Conservative party, which the government represented, had the power to remove its consensus for the government to continue to rule if it ran counter to the party's interests. The Liberal party had been making preparations for new revolts if government action caused the Conservatives to garner voter support from the working class at the exclusion of the Liberals.

Rather than heeding the traditional parties' and groups' interests, and despite their threats, the government responded to its own interests. These interests were founded in the need for the continuation of the then socio-politico-economic stability. The country needed this stability for its development and its existence as a nation. Since independence Colombia had been engaged in a series of struggles in attempting to remain a nation and prosper as one.<sup>45</sup> Political warfare had always prevented Colombia from reaching this badly sought-after goal of becoming a truly unified and prosperous nation.

There were historical precedents of great disruptions of Colombian stability that gave a basis for the government's concern over the workers' violent behavior. Some of the most serious of these precedents were: the military coup of 1854 by General Jose Melo (Commander of the Army who was supported by the Sociedad de Artesanos y Obreros); the Liberal revolt of 1889, the One Thousand Day War of 1898-1902; and the loss of Panama. Each one of these events individually

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<sup>45</sup>. Osterling, Democracy, 90.

carried the threat of national disintegration.<sup>46</sup> Another significant impetus for swift government action against the striking portworkers stems from the country's economic and fiscal crisis of 1899 which helped catapult Colombia into civil war for three long bloody years. The decline in world coffee prices coupled with production and transportation costs forced coffee growers to operate at a loss or cease production. The result was a sharp downfall in coffee exports and government revenues.

The 1918 Cartagena portworkers' strike presented a similar threat to government revenues. As long as port activity was disrupted the government lost precious revenues. The government needed to prevent the situation from deteriorating to a point of gravity as that of 1899. President Concha seized the initiative in constructing a substantive solution to the workers' threat that adequately addressed the government's interests. In a span of four days Concha and the government created and issued a well crafted series of decrees, setting parameters for working class collective action and the exclusion of non-worker

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<sup>46</sup>. Ibid.

elements from participation or manipulation of this worker action. President Concha's first decree, dated 11 January, 1918 declared a state of siege for the coastal states of Atlantico, Bolivar, and Magdalena.<sup>47</sup> This state of siege was instituted in response to the striking workers' threat to the internal peace of the nation. In actuality, this state of siege provided the national government with the legal basis to use whatever means necessary to deal effectively with the strike and its perpetrators.

Secondly, President Concha issued presidential decree No.2, dated 12 January, 1918 which likens the strike to provisions of the Penal Code that addressed acts of sedition.<sup>48</sup> The first part of this decree added to the legal basis for government action against the strikers. The second part of the decree, articles 7 and 8, declared that workers have the right to strike but limited strikes to simple acts of work stoppage. Additionally, it placed restrictions on the conduct of strikes and eligibility requirements for participants. Standing worker committees at the workplace were

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<sup>47</sup>. Diario Oficial, 11 January, 1918.

<sup>48</sup>. Ibid., 12 January, 1918.



prohibited; worker representatives had to be working members of the firm or business involved in arbitration; and striking workers had to be part of the labor force that is in strike against its firm or business.

The national government then issued decree No.77 (Min de Obras Publicas) on 12 January, 1918.<sup>49</sup> This decree provided pay raises to public employees in positions which controlled traffic operations on railroads, ports, and navigation systems (rivers). The government prevented government employees, involved in the transportation net, from getting caught up in the emerging working class collective action fervor. Government decree No.83 (Min de Gobierno), 14 January, 1918 provided workers in port cities with reduced train passage costs for round-trip weekend travel to their homes.<sup>50</sup> This provided an outlet for workers, thereby not allowing for the congregation of idle workers during the weekends. It raised rail ticket costs for persons who did not qualify as workers or did not possess a worker billet ticket. In this way the

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<sup>49</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., 14 January, 1918.

government limited the movement of political agitators and other potential disrupters of public order. Additionally, decree no.83 limited extra work and long working hours. The final governmental decree, presidential decree No.3 of 14 January, 1918 ordered that surplus funds from rents (River Magdalena taxes) be utilized to cover costs for keeping public order in the ports.<sup>51</sup> This redistribution of revenues covered the added expense of the security forces the government assigned to the ports immediately after the strikes. These forces guarded against any further labor unrest and political violence in the upcoming presidential election.

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<sup>51</sup>. Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

The government's views of the portworkers' violent behavior as all-threatening to the country's economic prosperity and political well-being gave it the propensity to react on its own behalf. The Liberals' attempts at influencing workers' political views caused a pandora's box of social troubles to be unleashed, without any means of control, upon Colombian society. The Liberals inadvertently introduced a new group with the massive potential to upset the existing Colombian socio-politico structure. Further more, because of the workers' direct influence on the country's economy they held the power to cause immediate disruption of the economy, the political system, and society. The government responded in the only manner that ensured its survival against this threat and that minimized the disruption of the socio-politico-economic structure of the country. Through its decrees the government effectively disarmed the emerging working class as a political tool, effectively protecting its own interests.

In disarming the labor movement as a political tool the government caused two effects to take place. First, the government removed labor from the political arena through its paternalistic policies, temporarily denying the traditional political parties a new potential source of political power. Secondly, and more profoundly, these paternalistic policies politically weaken the newly emerging working class. The provisions of the government decrees, although appearing pro-labor, imparted the government the means with which to effectively undercut workers' collective action. In this manner the government significantly reduced workers' potential for creating long-lasting ill effects on the country's socio-politico-economic structure. The newly emerging working class was brought under governmental control in a subservient role. The government gained the additional legitimate power, through its decrees, to block and negate any attempt by non-worker elements, specifically political ones, in using workers' collective action as a means of influencing political and economic policies.

In the final analysis the emerging Colombian working class, through the Cartagena portworkers'

strike, won a significant battle for social justice, setting the state-labor conflict in motion. In spite of their losses, in terms of loss of life, and the difficulties encountered at the hands of the government and the Liberal agitators, the workers won far more than they initially bargained for. In fact the ensuing government's decrees made the workers proteges of the government. Concurrently the government became the workers' benefactor. In this manner the government came out a winner, too. Through its decrees the government gained some control over the emerging working class. Yet, during the strike the workers had not been merely pawns of political interests or of the government. They (workers) saw the benefit, at that early point of their existence as a class, of gaining government protection in exchange for less autonomy. The workers knew they stood to gain more from the government than from fractionalized political groups. This ability of analyzing tradeoffs of alternatives greatly aided the workers in proving themselves as a formidable force, gaining the attention of all involved in the country's economic and political systems. At this point in Colombian history the working class

emerged as a permanent player in Colombian life and politics.

Table 1. Vol. and value of Coffee exports, 1910-18<sup>52</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Exports(60 kilo sacks)</u>	<u>Value</u>
1910	570,011	5,517,408
1911	631,666	9,475,448
1912	932,222	16,777,908
1913	1,020,741	18,369,768
1914	1,032,136	16,098,185
1915	1,129,849	18,278,631
1916	1,211,145	15,996,031
1917	1,047,394	17,651,569
1918	1,148,840	20,675,023

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<sup>52</sup>. Charles W. Bergquist. Coffee and Conflict, 1886-1910. (Durham, N.C.: 1978) 255.

TABLE 2. Colombia: Growth of Railways (km)<sup>53</sup>  
Selected Years, 1885-1909.

AREA	1885	1890	1898	1904	1909	1914
Caribbean	27	27	171	119	288	261
Antioquia	37.5	48		66	102	205
Pacific	37.5	52		43	94	234
Tolima	15	29	40	50	144	141
Cundinama	31	71	127	136	234	234
Santander	54	55	55	77	89	91
TOTAL	202	255	498	565	900	1166

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<sup>53</sup>. Jose Escorcia. Colombia: Economic and Political Aspects in Development. Ph.D dissertation. (San Diego: 1975) 60.



Table 3. Fuel (oil/coal) Imports<sup>54</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount (kilo)</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>% Val of all Imports</u>
1898	2,712,846		
1905	4,154,418		
1910	15,093,072	\$312,902	1.80
1911	15,076,337	371.447	2.05
1912	17,310,374	564,064	2.35
1913	22,717,602	523,501	1.83
1914	18,981,126	554,896	2.64
1915	13,531,503	607,056	3.40
1916	17,188,596	681,816	2.30
1917	22,468,523	793,544	3.21
1918	9,453,217	909,498	4.18

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<sup>54</sup>. Informe del Ministro de Hacienda al Congreso de 1911 (Bogota:1911), Caudro Anexo.

Table 4. Major Cartagenian Industries<sup>55</sup>

<u>Name</u>	<u>Owner(s)</u>	<u>Product</u>
Colombian Sugar Co.	Velez Danies	Sugar
Cartagena Oil Refining Co.	Diego Martinez	
fuel/lub.		
Fabricas de Tejidos	Banco Union	
textiles		

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55. Urueta, Cartagena, 325.

Table 5. Cartagena Oil Refining Co. 1912 Prod Rates  
(Monthly)<sup>56</sup>

<u>Product</u>	<u>Octane</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Gasoline	72	-
Kerosene "Luz Solar"	110	-
Kerosene "Luz Brillante"	150	-
Fuel oil (Diesel grade)	-	-
Machine oil	-	-
Lubricating oil	-	-
Total: 100,000 gal.s*		

\*individual quantities are unavailable

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56. Urueta, Cartagena, 325.

Table 6. Presidential Elections Results<sup>57</sup>  
(under Con. Reforms of 1910)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Votes</u>
1914	Vicente Concha (Con.)	300,735
	Nicolas Esguerra (Rep.)	36,763
	Total:	337,498
1918	Marco F. Suarez (Con.)	216,595
	Guillermo Valencia (Lib.)	166,498
	Jose Lombana Barreneche	24,041
	Total:	407,134

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<sup>57</sup>. Historia Colombiana, 231.

Table 7. Cartagena-based Transport Companies<sup>58</sup>  
1912

<u>Name</u>	<u>Owner/Agent</u>
(Interior Traffic)	
Cartagena (Colombia) Railway Co	Pineda Lopez y Cia.
La Colombia Steambook Company	Diego Martinez y Cia.
(Exterior Traffic)	
Royal Mail Steam Packet Company	Pineda Lopez
Leyland - Liverpool, UK	Pedro Macia
Harrison - Liverpool, Uk	Pedro Macia
Hamburg American Line	Pineda Lopez
Compagnie Generale TransAtlantique	LeCompte y Hijos
La Compania Hamburgussa Americana	Robert Glaeser
La Veloce	D. Juan B. Mainero
United Fruit Company	

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<sup>58</sup>. Urueta, Cartagena, 340.

Table 8. Cartagenian Businesses and Industries<sup>59</sup>

<u>Product</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Workers(3)</u>	
<u>Founded</u>			
objetos de carey (turtle shell)	A. Jaspe	unk	1870
jabon (soap)	R. Roman	unk	1880
jabon (soap)	F. Morales	unk	1882
jabon (soap)	V. Beneletti	unk	1883
fosforos (matches)	Jose Jaspe	unk	1878
various	Federico Romero		
distilleries	Simon Alandete		
brewery	G. Espriella		1877
hilados/tejidos (fabric/threads)	Merlana y Cia.	160	1892
oil refinery	D. Martinez	180	1907
calzado (footwear)	G.Espriella	60	1903
suelas (shoe soles)	"	"	"
teneria (hides)	D Augusto Tono	25	1891
medias (stocking)	Visbal y hijos	32	1909
muebles (furniture)	Lequerica	22	1899
farmaceuticos	Roman y hijos		
farmaceuticos	F.& A. Franco		

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59. Ibid., 343-7.

Table 8. Continuation.

<u>Product</u>	<u>Owner</u>
mosaicos y granito	Velez Danies
bebidas gaseosas	Luis C. Villa
puntillas (needles)	Raul Roman P.
libros y tinta	J.V. Mogollon

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## INTRODUCTION

Colombia is currently experiencing a dramatic change in the peace process between the government and the guerrilla groups. 1989 saw the peace process gain significant momentum compared with its protracted character in the 1970s and 80s, when peace negotiations produced limited gains for both sides but no lasting or mutually beneficial effects. Both the government and the guerrilla groups contributed to this earlier stagnation of prior peace negotiations and agreements. So what has caused this sudden surge forward in the peace process? The unique argument offered here is that the Colombian drug problem (cocaine production and trafficking) has speeded up the peace process by changing the stakes in the game because it presents a new threat to both sides.

This study provides an insight as to how the drug problem threatens both the guerrillas and the government and how it thereby accelerates the peace process. Although discussion will touch on all the major guerrilla groups, the M-19's role in the peace process is primary to this study. The M-19, due to its nationalistic bearings, has long been considered by the

government to be the one guerrilla group with the potential to cause fundamental disruptions in the country's political structure. However, the M-19 has had a long-term opposition to any peace negotiations in the past. M-19's present reversal reflects the most dramatic change of any actor's position in the peace process.

The government's position of chief initiator of peace negotiations will be analyzed in order to examine how the drug problem is affecting it. Discussion also includes the military as an agent of the government to see how its counterinsurgency mission in relation to the peace process has been affected. But first, an overview of the development of both the M-19 as well as the drug trade will be presented as preludes to the current situation.

## VIOLENCE AND GUERRILLA WARFARE

The roots of present-day politically motivated violence in Colombia lie in the unorganized civil war ("la violencia") of 1948-53 and its aftermath. This civil war began with the Bogotazo of 9 April, 1948, a massive and highly destructive riot in Bogota. The Bogotazo was basically the climax of an accumulation of socio-economic tensions fueled by inter-party rivalries between the Conservative and Liberal political parties. It was ignited by the murder of presidential hopeful and Liberal Party boss Jorge Eliecer Gaitan on 9 April, 1948.<sup>1</sup>

The murder of Gaitan was interpreted by Liberals as a Conservative attempt to prevent a Liberal return to power.<sup>2</sup> Gaitan had the support and potential to win the next presidential election. The Congress had a Liberal Party majority, but the Conservative Party held the presidency, President Ospina Perez. The two

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Herman, Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela (New York, 1988), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, Democracy in Colombia: Clientalist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (New Brunswick, 1988), 88.

branches were continually manoeuvring against each other in attempts to consolidate or gain power over one another. The Bogotazo caused this inter-party rivalry to burst from a smoldering fire into open flames.

Immediately after the Bogotazo, rural violence, sponsored by both parties, developed at an increasingly fast pace along with urban violence. Partisan guerrilla groups emerged with differing ideologies and with the Conservative government acting against all of them. The initial guerrilla bands, mostly supported and sponsored by the Liberal party, split under very strong government pressure; while some of their members continued demanding the return of the rural properties they claimed, others, following Communist and Liberal Party ideological advice, continued in the struggle and organized the nation's first guerrilla groups.<sup>3</sup>

General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Colombian Army Commander, took over as president on 13 June, 1953, due to internal disagreements between acting President Urdaneta and President Gomez. He assumed the presidency without bloodshed and quickly worked to bring the country back to normalcy. The Colombian

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid, 91.



populace was weary with the political fanaticism that was destroying the nation. This weariness afforded Rojas immediate support from all sectors of society.

Rojas Pinilla successfully offered amnesty to all bandits and guerrillas.<sup>4</sup> The Communist guerrillas ceased combat operations and retired their forces to an inhospitable and almost inaccessible area located in southeastern Tolima, northeast Huila, and southern Cundinamarca area. The Liberal guerrillas turned in their weapons and accepted Rojas Pinilla's peace proposal.<sup>5</sup> General Rojas Pinilla lost the presidency to the constructors of the National Front in 1957 after attempting to assure himself of a long presidency through legislative manipulations.

The National Front plan for governing Colombia allowed both traditional political parties to formally share in ruling the country. It was a result of an inter-party compromise to end the violence that was destroying the country. But National Front administrations could not successfully handle rural subversive groups. As far as the political parties

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<sup>4</sup>. Ibid., 94.

<sup>5</sup>. Ibid.

were concerned, these subversives had served their purpose.<sup>6</sup> The first National Front administration under Conservative President Lleras Camargo approved an amnesty bill but it failed due to meager governmental support. Camargo's administration also coincided with the Cuban Revolution and Castro's follow-on program of Revolution for Exportation.

Castro's program caused a proliferation of new more rigidly communist guerrilla groups in Colombia such as the Ejercito Popular de Liberacion (EPL) and the Ejercito Popular de Liberacion Nacional (ELN). Some of the old communist agrarian groups of the early 1950s reorganized in semi-autonomous rural regions. The largest and most successful was the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejercito de Pueblo (FARC-EP). The ELN, EPL, and the FARC-EP became the main thrust of the Communists' attempts to subvert Colombia's democratic form of government. The Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19), a nationalist urban guerrilla group, also appeared at this same time.

On 19 April, 1970 presidential elections were held for the 1970-74 presidential term. This was the last

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<sup>6</sup>. Ibid, 96.

administration of the National Front. According to the 1959 constitutional reforms one of the Conservative Party's various candidates was to be elected president in 1970.<sup>7</sup> Although General Rojas Pinilla led the Conservative Party's candidates by a wide margin, Pastrana (the Conservative Party candidate) was declared winner. Some of Rojas' supporters from his political party (ANAPO), for the most part urban professionals, organized the Movimiento 19 de April as a nationalist and populist movement.<sup>8</sup> It sought structural changes in Colombia's political system. Its ultimate goal was to provide the nation with a political alternative to the two traditional parties. Its name serves as a reminder of the electoral fraud of 19 April, 1970.

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7. Diario Oficial, 1959.

8. German Castro Cayudo, Del ELN al M-19 (Bogota, 1980), 67.

### MOVIMIENTO 19 DE ABRIL - M19

The M-19 was the shooting star of the Colombian insurgency. It arrived on the scene in a blaze of bank robberies and the theft of Bolivar's sword as a symbol of its goal to return Colombia to Bolivar's ideal of an independent nation with benefit for all.<sup>9</sup> But by the late 1970s government action had inflicted serious losses on the M-19, severely reducing its operational capability.

The M-19 conducted several high level kidnappings, executions, the takeover of the Dominican Republic's embassy, break-in of the Army's Bogota arsenal, and (the most infamous of all) the Palace of Justice takeover in 1985. But the intense nature of its operations brought heavy casualties and imprisonment of many of its leaders, eventually leading the M-19 to take advantage of President Betancur's amnesty program.

After the collapse of the ceasefire in late 1984 the M-19 found itself in numerous fierce confrontations with government forces. The M-19 made attempts to organize a united guerrilla front through its efforts

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<sup>9</sup>. Herman, Democracy in Latin America, 231.

in establishing the National Guerrilla Coordinating Group (NGCG).<sup>10</sup> The NGCG was to maintain an intelligence net to provide information on individual group operations and to limit confusion among guerrilla groups and attacks on supporters. It also aids in identifying the private armies responsible for attacks on the guerrilla groups. The NGCG has not been successful due mainly to inter-guerrilla group suspicions. The M19 eliminated any remaining possibility of peace during Betancur's administration by its attack on the Palace of Justice. With the same act it lost support among the masses who condemned the attack.

By August, 1988, the M-19 found itself calling for a peace summit between it and President Barco's government. Both amnestied ex-members and non-amnesty members were being killed off at an alarming rate. But President Barco did not accept the M-19's proposal, since at this point he held the upper hand. To accept the M-19's proposal would have allowed it to retain the initiative in the negotiations. President Barco was not under the same pressures as the M-19, and he had

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<sup>10</sup>. Castro, Del Eln al M-19, 73.

the flexibility of offering a counter-proposal. He issued his own peace plan in September, 1988, which the M-19 readily accepted. The plan promised only a dialogue with guerrilla groups that gave up the struggle.<sup>11</sup> The ensuing peace talks were the first direct contact between Barco's administration and any guerrilla group. The M-19 abided by all the conditions forwarded by the government; it issued a public announcement that it was ceasing combat operations, and that it would use only political means to address its demands.<sup>12</sup>

The M-19's haste to find a definite peace is not difficult to understand. It was fighting a war on three fronts without depth in its defenses. The most significant threat to its survival was the growing front of attack from the drug cartels' private armies.<sup>13</sup> Since the early 1980s the M-19 has moved its base of operations to rural regions. This shift to the rural regions and the accompanying government

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<sup>11</sup>. Economic Intelligence Unit, Country Report No.1 (London, 1986), 6.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>. Latin American Monitor, July-Aug Report (London, 1989), 680.

attention to these areas threatened the drug cartels' operations. The increasing intensity and frequency of the drug cartels' private armies, and the government, attacks on the M-19 since 1982 have caused the M-19 to suffer extreme manpower losses, thus sapping its strength. Additionally the loss of popular support has further eroded its capacity to attract new members.

With reduced manpower came loss of operational flexibility, economy of action, and security of its sanctuaries. Add to this dilemma the pressures of the drug cartels' private armies and the tactical situation became intolerable. In the rural regions these private armies could attack M-19 forces and deny them free use of the terrain. The private armies' attacks on communities were blamed on the M-19, which resulted in increased military action against it. In urban areas the M-19 was affected in basically the same manner. Its urban operations (especially bank robberies) were continuously disrupted by the private armies.

An additional factor in the M-19's desperate quest for peace has been the government's modernization of the military (specifically the Army) to combat the drug

cartels and their forces.<sup>14</sup> In the past the Army had been only marginally (if at all) successful in combatting the M-19. Poor means of communications, lack of rapid deployment means, and nonexistent independent small unit action coupled with poor intelligence characterized and plagued Army counterguerrilla operations. The current modernization program has addressed these inadequacies. While it was geared primarily in making the Army effective against the drug cartels' private armies, the program also enhanced counterguerrilla capabilities.

It is this last factor that caused great consternation in the M-19, which now finds itself in a no-win situation. In order to gain safety through peace it had first to give up the armed struggle and lose its ability to defend itself. But, if the government were to dismantle the private armies ( as the M-19 desires) the Colombian army's counterguerrilla capabilities would be enhanced once the private armies are eliminated.

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<sup>14.</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report No.1, 7.



There are two other alternative courses of action for the M-19. First, it can abandon the peace process again and face its eventual destruction at the hands of the Army, right-wing anti-guerrilla groups, and the drug cartels' private armies. The second alternative is to launch a massive frontal attack, joining in the current drug war to attempt to bring down the government. This last is probably the least expected by the government, since it runs counter to the M-19's goal of opening up the political process, not destroying it. Yet, in order to survive the M-19 may very well have to attempt to bring down the government. But when all avenues of approach to survival are cut off, a commander must, above all else, preserve his fighting strength in whatever manner possible in order to live to fight another day. So, this last alternative course of action is definitely out of the question for a group suffering from a depletion of forces (as the M-19 currently is).

The M-19 has thus decided to seek to preserve itself as a viable political force through the peace process. Its single overriding demand in the peace accords it entered with President Barco's government in

March, 1989 is to have the private armies and other paramilitary groups dismantled.<sup>15</sup> The government's initial reaction has been to order a crackdown on these groups.<sup>16</sup> The crackdown is causing a violent backlash from the drug cartels, which have attacked both government forces and the M-19.<sup>17</sup> The government's crackdown on the private armies is a major factor in the proliferation of the current drug war. There is no turning back for the M-19. It has to ensure that its peace pact with the government is a lasting one.

This need for genuine peace was evident in the M-19's promptness in accepting President Barco's peace proposal and lessening its demands for complete restructuring of the nation's political infrastructure as a condition to peace. Time is running out for the M-19. Presidential elections in May, 1990 may usher in a Conservative administration, which may not be inclined to peace negotiations with the M-19. A Conservative administration may not be tolerant toward

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15. Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report No.2 (London, 1989), 5.

16. Ibid.

17. El Tiempo, September 8, 1989.

accepting the M-19 back into the political fold.

By May, 1990 the government's forces will be better equipped and trained due to the continuing drug war. Such an upgrading of its capabilities enhance counter guerrilla capabilities. Consequently, a Conservative administration might be more apt to turn its forces on the M-19 to eliminate it as a viable threat. Only through a sanctioned peace pact and legislation can the M-19 protect itself from such a threat.

## DRUG TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND CARTELS

### Drug Trade Development

Illicit drug trade growth was dramatic in the mid-70s. Although Colombia has always had an illicit drug trade, several factors in the mid-70s caused the meteoric rise of Colombia as the world's drug-smuggling capital.<sup>18</sup> Oddly enough, the most significant factors were the side-effects of the United States' anti-drug campaign in Mexico that sought to destroy the illicit marijuana and heroin trade. The Drug Enforcement Agency launched a highly effective illicit crop eradication program in Mexico in the fall of 1975.

The DEA's eradication program of marijuana and poppy fields in Mexico diminished both the supply and popularity of Mexican marijuana in the United States.<sup>19</sup> First, the eradication program severely cut down the amount of marijuana available for export to the United States. Secondly, what was available for

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<sup>18</sup>. Robert H. Dix, The Politics of Colombia (Stanford, 1987), 35.

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid.

export was tainted with parquat, the herbicide utilized to destroy the marijuana. Parquat caused health problems in American users and reduced sales of parquat tainted marijuana. Yet the demand for illicit drugs in the United States grew.

Colombian drug traffickers took advantage of this void in supply. They launched an unprecedented effort to supplying the burgeoning U.S. demand for marijuana and cocaine. Colombian drug traffickers soon were providing the majority of parquat-free marijuana and cocaine entering the United States. But the Mexican eradication program was only partly responsible for the surge in Colombia drug trafficking. Drug smuggling operations require a particular ambience.

Colombia's geography makes Colombia an ideal locale in which to cultivate, process, and smuggle illicit drugs.<sup>20</sup> Much of the land is remote, inhospitable, and inaccessible, making it very difficult to police. The northern coastline is ideal for smuggling by sea, while hundreds of clandestine landing strips make smuggling by air relatively easy. Marijuana and cocaine can be grown in practically every

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<sup>20</sup>. Ibid., 51.

region of the country. Although geography is conducive to smuggling operations, violence is the other main factor that allowed for Colombia to be truly ideal for such operations.

The Colombian insurgent groups provide (and still provide) drug traffickers with a blanket of violence that was most conducive for smuggling operations. They drew the attention of the government and its limited resources away from other major problems such as the illicit drug trade. Additionally, guerrilla warfare allowed for collusion between the drug cartels and government elements through a common linkage provided by the regional self defense (paramilitary) groups organized by the military as force multipliers in counterinsurgency campaigns. Some of these self defense groups have been co-opted by the drug cartels as private armies for their own security purposes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>. Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report No.2, 5.

Emergence of the Medellin Drug Cartel

On 22 November, 1975 Colombia realized for the first time the enormity of its illicit cocaine trade. A small airplane had attempted to sneak in for a landing at the Cali airport under cover of the radar clutter of an Avianca Airlines commercial jet.<sup>22</sup> Upon searching the airplane police at the Cali airport found six hundred kilos of cocaine, the biggest seizure in history up to that time.<sup>23</sup> The packages of cocaine bore markings which, after painstaking efforts at deciphering, indicated ownership. The marked shipment of cocaine was hard evidence of the existence of the purported cartels, a fact that U.S. law enforcement officials would take four more years to realize. All the evidence and intelligence pointed to a known group of Colombian individuals operating out of Medellin. It was in Medellin where the business end of illicit cocaine processing and trafficking took root.

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22. Guy Gugliotta and Jeff Lean, Kings of Cocaine (New York, 1989), 23.

23. Ibid.

In colonial times Medellin was a remote, isolated mining center in the state of Antioquia. It proved to be a harsh and unpleasant place for colonists from Bogota and elsewhere who preferred the splendor and rich life of Bogota.<sup>24</sup> Consequently the people of Medellin were thought of as crude and ill-bred by Bogotanos, who labelled them paisas.

Although Medellin had only secondary importance as a gold mining center (some 40 percent of all the gold mined in colonial Colombia came from Antioquia), in the eighteenth century it quickly became the center of Colombian industry, a position it continued to hold throughout the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Local groups in Antioquia challenged the traditional privilege of the merchant class in Bogota by developing independent merchant, mining, and industrial activities.<sup>26</sup> Entrepreneurship became an innate characteristic of the antioqueños.

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<sup>24</sup>. Gugliotta and Lean, Kings, 21.

<sup>25</sup>. Roger Brew, Desarrollo economico de Antioquia desde la independencia hasta 1920 (Bogota, 1977), 131.

<sup>26</sup>. William Paul McGreevey, Economic History of Colombia, 1845 to 1910 (London, 1972), 73.



Another innate characteristic of the inhabitants of Medellin was the knack they had for smuggling. Since colonial times Medellin has had a reputation as a smuggling center. During the colonial period paisas smuggled gold to European countries and their New World colonies in defiance of Spanish authority. In the nineteenth century paisa peddlers sold goods to locals through a black market system, evading government taxation on these goods. During the twentieth century Antioquian businessmen, both respectable and not so respectable, made a living smuggling liquor, cigarettes, and other contraband from the United States.<sup>27</sup> Television sets, stereos, and other desirable electronic products were smuggled in from the duty-free ports of the Panama Canal Zone.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to 1973 cocaine processing and trafficking was a cottage industry based in Chile.<sup>29</sup> The Chilean illicit cocaine trade was a small time operation. Chilean processors bought coca leaf and paste from Peru and Bolivia and then processed it into cocaine

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27. Gugliotta and Lean, Kings, 21.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid, 22.

hydrochloride. The Chileans shipped the finished product to the United States, sometimes using Colombian smugglers. After the September 1973 overthrow of Chilean President Allende by General Pinochet, the Chilean cocaine trade came to a halt at the hands of Pinochet's police.<sup>30</sup> The surviving Chilean cocaine traders moved to Colombia.

The Colombians, who had the smuggling know-how and easy access to the coca leaf production in Peru and Bolivia, needed the Chileans' technical know-how in processing the coca paste into cocaine hydrochloride. It was an accomodating relationship. By 1975 the Colombians had eliminated all foreigners and had full control of the Colombian illicit cocaine trade. Although cocaine production was centered within a area set off by the cities of Bogota, Cali, and Medellin, Medellin was dominant. Medellin's dominance was made evident by the aftermath that occurred after the November, 1975 seizure of the small plane at the Cali airport.

The seizure sparked an outbreak of inter-cartel (between the Medellin and Cali cartels) violence. The

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<sup>30</sup>. Ibid.

violence drew the immediate attention of the nation. Forty people, all involved in the cocaine trade in one manner or another, were killed over the weekend following the Cali airport seizure.<sup>31</sup> All the murders took place in Medellin, none in Cali, thus indicating that Medellin was the center for this illicit trade.<sup>32</sup>

The principal members of the Medellin cartel were Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Carlos Lehder, Jose Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha (deceased), Grisela Blanco, and Jorge Luis Ochoa Vasquez and family. The Ochoa family includes Fabio Ochoa Restrepo (partriarch) and sons Jorge Luis Ochoa Vasquez, Juan David Ochoa Vasquez, and Fabio Ochoa Vasquez. Carlos Lehder Rivas was the principal transportation and distribution chief for the Medellin cartel prior to his arrest and imprisonment in 1987. Grisela Blanco was an early distributor and enforcer for the Medellin cartel. The Ochoa family's chief cocaine distributor in the late 1970s and early 1980s was Rafael Cardona Salazar.

The Cali Cartel is smaller than the Medellin cartel. It basically follows the Medellin cartel's

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<sup>31</sup>. Ibid., 23.

<sup>32</sup>. Ibid.

lead but has a tendency to strike out on its own much to the consternation of the Medellin cartel. In fact, this tendency of the Cali cartel to operate independently is the primary source of the periodic inter-cartel drug wars. The Cali cartel's leader was (and still is) Gilberto Jose Rodriguez Orejuela. Second-in-command was Jose Santacruz Londono. Other major members included Miguel Angel Rodriguez Orejuela, Jaime Raul Orejuela Caballero, and Jose Ivan Duarte Acero. Jose Ivan Duarte Acero is a main stateside distributor for the Cali cartel but has been known to serve both cartels on more than one occasion. By 1979 these two groups controled over 70 percent of the world's illicit cocaine trade, with the U.S. as their principal market.<sup>33</sup>

In December, 1981 the drug cartels, lead by the Medellin cartel, organized a security group call Death to Kidnappers (MAS-Muerte a Secuestradores).<sup>34</sup> Its objective was to kill guerrillas who were interdicting smuggling operations, extorting money from cocaleros

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<sup>33</sup>. Narcotics Trafficking Report, United States Southern Command (Panama, 1988), 10.

<sup>34</sup>. Osterling, Democracy in Colombia, 328.

(smalltime coca growers and processors), kidnapping drug dealers and their family members, or threatening the property of newly landed drug lords.

The formation of MAS was the first time that the Colombian drug lords had entered a joint public position on any matter in which they had a common interest other than drug trafficking. It had a consolidating effect on the Medellin cartel. Prior to this venture the cocaine lords had cooperated with each other in business and even established a basis for a common cocaine trafficking policy. Now they had stepped forward together in public with a communique, signed by over two hundred traffickers from all over Colombia, announcing the cartel's new policy toward kidnappers.

The communique basically stated that "223 top-level Colombian businessmen decided they would no longer tolerate ransom kidnappings by guerrilla groups seeking to finance their revolutions through the sacrifices of people, who, like ourselves, have brought progress and employment to the country."<sup>35</sup> "The basic objective of MAS will be the public and immediate

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<sup>35</sup>. Gugliotta and Lean, Kings, 91-92.

execution of all those involved in kidnappings beginning from the date of this communique, December 3, 1981."<sup>36</sup> The communique offered twenty million pesos (\$300,000) reward for information leading to the capture of a kidnapper and guaranteed immediate retribution.<sup>37</sup> Those found guilty "will be hung from the trees in public parks or shot and marked with the sign of our group - MAS."<sup>38</sup> Jailed kidnappers would be murdered, and, if this proved impossible, "our retribution will fall on their comrades in jail and on their closest family members."<sup>39</sup>

There were two major incidents, both involving the M-19, that galvanized the drug lords to form the MAS and unleash it upon the M-19. The first incident occurred in the Quindio province. In November, 1981 Carlos Lehder, the king of cocaine transportation, while enroute from the city of Armenia to his favorite finca, was kidnapped by two members of the M-19. As they drove away, with Lehder tied and laying on the

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36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

floor of their car, he slipped his bonds and jumped out of the car.<sup>40</sup> His captors fired at him as he ran away, striking him high in the back.<sup>41</sup>

The Lehder kidnapping was not, however, the catalyst that brought the MAS into being. His kidnapping was important but not as grave as the kidnapping of one of the Medellin drug cartel's most prominent leader's daughter. On November 12, 1981 the M-19 kidnapped Marta Nieves Ochoa, youngest daughter of Jorge Ochoa, from the University of Antioquia in Medellin.<sup>42</sup> The M-19 demanded a ransom somewhere in the neighborhood of \$12 to \$15 million. Jorge Ochoa was totally enraged but determined not to pay. Instead he convened the drug lord conference that formulated the MAS and issued the communique announcing the cartel's new policy.

After the communique was issued the Medellin cartel unleashed MAS upon the M-19. MAS tore through the M-19, killing or turning in more than one hundred

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40. Ibid., 89.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid, 92.

M-19 members within six weeks of the communique.<sup>43</sup> In January, 1982 MAS captured the Antioquia province chief of the M-19, stripped and tied him up. Afterwards they dumped him in a vacant lot in northern Bogota and called the police.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, MAS had accomplished something that the Colombian army had tried and failed to do for years.<sup>45</sup> MAS severely disrupted M-19 operations in Antioquia and reduced M-19's capacity to carry out operations by beheading its leadership. MAS forced the M-19 to release Marta Nieves unharmed on February 17, 1982. MAS' activity gave the Medellin cartel an air of omnipotence and added to its mystic.

Throughout the entire period of MAS' initial activity (Dec. 81 to Feb. 82) the authorities stood idly by and simply collected the corpses and jailed those guerrillas turned in by MAS. The fact that the authorities did nothing to curb the violence brought on by MAS furthered M-19's suspicions of the government's intentions toward it. It almost seemed as if the

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43. Ibid, 93.

44. Ibid., 95.

45. Ibid.



government was siding with the Medellin cartel and MAS. The M-19 suffered severe and irreplaceable losses at the hands of MAS. Coupled with later government and MAS attacks, the M-19 was reduced to a shell of its prior self.

### PEACE AND DRUGS

In the midst of the 1980's war President Barco's government managed to come to terms with the M-19. A definite peace pact was signed by M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Leongomez and presidential peace adviser Rafael Pardo Rueda.<sup>46</sup> It is the result of peace talks that were initiated in January 1989 with the M-19's acceptance and compliance with the government's peace plan of September, 1988. An important element of this latest peace plan was the extension of amnesty to all M-19 members. While this amnesty is not new to peace negotiations, it is nevertheless significant. Without amnesty the peace process would have continued in a state of limbo.

Prior to this extension of amnesty, Colombia granted amnesty three times through peace negotiations in attempts to end its endemic political violence. In 1954 President Rojas successfully offered amnesty to all bandits and guerrillas in bringing normalcy back to

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<sup>46</sup>. Times of the Americas, October 4, 1989.

the country after the Violencia.<sup>47</sup> In 1981, President Turbay offered amnesty in an attempt to end two decades of guerrilla warfare.<sup>48</sup> President Betancur initiated the 1982 amnesty law, which aided in bringing guerrilla warfare to a temporary halt and gave birth to the Union Patriótica (FARC-EP's political wing).<sup>49</sup>

According to their architects, the 1981 and 1982 amnesties failed because they imposed too many conditions. But these conditions are only partly to blame for the failures.<sup>50</sup> Each one of these amnesties, including President Barco's, occurred during heightened counter-guerrilla and anti-government violence. In the last two amnesty periods, both the guerrillas and government elements were main perpetrators of the accompanying violence. The M-19 and government elements increased attacks on each other during peace negotiations to manoeuver for better positions for negotiation. Private armies of the drug

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<sup>47</sup>. John D. Martz, Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey (Chapel Hill, 1962), 176-7.

<sup>48</sup>. Brian M. Jenkins, Rand Report: Colombia's Bold Gamble for Peace (Santa Monica, Ca, 1985), 5.

<sup>49</sup>. Ibid., 9.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., 5.

cartels have played a similar role but with a goal of disrupting the peace process.

The drug cartels require an atmosphere of instability in order to be able to carry out trafficking operations. They use the ongoing warfare between the M-19 and the government to mask their operations. In an atmosphere of sustained instability, a government cannot focus on every problem area simultaneously. It will focus attention and its limited resources on its most pressing need. Anti-government forces in open rebellion usually provide such a need because of the viable threat they present to the government's existence. Successful peace negotiations and settlement of open conflict between the government and guerrilla groups allow the government to reallocate its forces and resources to the next pressing need. In Colombia's case the next pressing need is elimination of the drug problem, and hence the need for the drug cartels to disrupt the peace process.

During President Betancur's administration (1982-86) the first indications surfaced of the drug cartels' attempts at disrupting peace negotiations between the

M-19 and the government surfaced. As the peace process approached the point of signing ceasefire agreements, attacks and kidnappings increased dramatically. The M-19 was accused of these atrocities, the argument being that the M-19 committed these actions in attempts to impress upon the government its strength and power or to gain a better bargaining position.

While the M-19 might have desired such bargaining strength, these actions do not fit the group's modus operandi at the time. The M-19's tactics were urban-based efforts that selected targets for maximum effect. In addition, the M-19 suffered severe losses just prior to and after the signing of the ceasefire agreement on 24 August, 1984. On 21 August, 1984 former Congressman and M-19 leader Carlos Toleda Plata was gunned down near his home in Bucaramanga.<sup>51</sup> Other members who had entered Bogota for the peace talks suffered injuries in grenade attacks and other violent attacks against their person. Yet the group and its members had received amnesty under Law No. 35 of 1982. It does not make sense for the government to have carried out these attacks against the very same group with which it was

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<sup>51</sup>. El Tiempo, August 22, 1984.

negotiating peace. Nevertheless, as a result of these attacks the M-19 broke its agreement with the government and returned to its campaign of armed conflict.

President Barco (1986-90) thus inherited a dead peace process with the M-19 in open armed conflict with the government. The M-19's acquiescence to peace talks in 1989 was peculiar, since the government's current peace proposal is not significantly different than the one signed in August, 1984 with then President Betancur. Keeping in mind the failure of past peace negotiations, what propelled the M-19 to come so readily to the peace table with President Barco? While the M-19 finds its ranks being decimated by attacks from several avenues, is this enough to bring it to the negotiation table?

The 1989 drug war between the drug cartels and the government was directly linked to the M-19's acquiescence to peace. In the past the drug cartels had been successful in disrupting peace negotiations. Cartel attacks on the M-19 caused the M-19 to become distrustful of the government's intentions and to break its peace agreements in 1984. Yet, drug cartel

attempts, beginning in 1988, to again disrupt these attempts at peace had the opposite effect on the M-19. Instead of making it abandon peace negotiations, drug cartel attacks caused the M-19 to come to terms with the government through a definite peace pact, ceasefire agreement and peace proposal of President Barco. Consequently, the drug cartels have shifted to a new strategy of directly attacking the government to disrupt the peace process.

### THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT

The Colombian government enjoys a much stronger position in the peace process than does the M-19. In spite of this superior position, the drug problem has changed the government's stake in the peace process by the threat it poses to the government in several areas. At the beginning of the latest round of negotiations beginning in 1988, President Barco seized the initiative from the M-19. He was able to do so because of the enormous pressures being placed upon the M-19 by the Colombian military and the drug cartels' private armies. Seeing that their actions forced the M-19 into serious and substantial peace negotiations, the drug cartels turned their sights on the government. The government's response has been to continue substantive negotiations with the M-19 while carrying out an all-out campaign against the drug cartels.<sup>52</sup>

This eventuality was a long way in coming. The drug cartels have caused problems for the Colombian government for decades. The government has taken serious anti-drug action not just at the insistence of

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<sup>52</sup>. El Tiempo, October 4, 1989.



the United States. The Colombian government has had every intention of eliminating the drug problem. However, its central concern is the economy. Yet, in order to improve its economy it can only do so in a politically and socially stable environment. Both the guerrilla groups and drug cartels want to avoid the existence of such a stable environment. The government had to choose which of these two problems it was to address first.

Up until recently the drug problem was second in importance, as a national problem, to the guerrilla insurgency. Additionally, the criminal nature of the drug problem did not allow much room for negotiations. On the other hand, the possibility of negotiating peace with the M-19 and other guerrilla groups was more realistic. Another impetus to deal first with the M-19 was that the guerrillas posed a graver danger because of their campaign of armed conflict. It is on these grounds that the government gave peace negotiations a higher priority than the drug problem, much to the consternation of the United States.

Although the guerrilla insurgency continued to be of critical importance, the drug problem has become

paramount for the Colombian government. Drug traffickers, their political and social maladies, and their millions of dollars constitute the greatest single threat to Colombian democracy. Politically, drug trafficking has been very damaging to the Colombian political system. Drug trafficking creates a sort of shadow government that can threaten any government because of the enormity of the trafficking, the vast amounts of money involved, and the great temptations it presents.

Drug cartels have tainted all political factions with drug dollars (commonly referred to as Hot Money by Colombian politicians). The Liberal party has suffered the most for two reasons. First, the Liberal party had to contend with Pablo Escobar's status as a Liberal congressman. In 1982 Pablo Escobar was elected as alternate representative for Jairo Ortega who was elected as representative for the district of Envigado.<sup>53</sup> Escobar enjoyed all the benefits and status of a representative. His duties centered on assuming the congressional seat during any absences of Jairo Ortega. Secondly, the Liberal party suffered a

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<sup>53</sup>. Gugliotta and Lean, Kings, 97-99.

terrible loss, at the hands of the cartels, with the assassination of Senator Luis Carlos Galan. Galan, New Liberal party member, was the leading Liberal precandidate for the presidential elections in 1990. Most Colombian politicians regarded Galan as a shoe-in for the presidency.

The Conservative party has suffered too, although not as badly as the Liberal party. Some Conservative members have been linked to drug money laundering through the Colombian banking system. Interest groups represented by the Conservative party have been openly supporting private armies that have drug cartel connections. Thus, in a roundabout manner the Conservatives have been tagged by Liberal politicians as being supportive of the drug cartels. Suspensions arose with Galan's murder that the Conservatives may have been attempting to prevent the Liberal party from retaining the presidency in the 1990 presidential elections (reminiscent of Gaitan's assassination). Although no hard evidence has been found to substantiate this assertion, the assassins of Galan have not been identified. The suspects arrested soon after the attack on Galan are still only suspects.

The drug cartels have made damaging inroads in other sectors of the government, with the most significant damage in the judicial system. The drug cartels have made a mockery of the judicial process wherever traffickers stand accused, and have sombered the lives of judges, lawyers, and their families. The cartels are able to wreak havoc on the Colombian judicial system for several reasons. Members of the judiciary, at all levels, do not enjoy the protective services the government provides important politicians, members of the military and police forces, and office holders. But most significantly the judiciary members do not enjoy the status of other professionals in Colombian society.

The majority of judges and public defenders do not belong to elite families. Most lawyers in the traditional sector, public law, come from the middle and lower classes. Their pay is low and not adequately commensurate with the importance of their judicial duties, especially given the current situation in Colombia. Members of elite families who enter the legal field usually specialize in business and corporate law. These lawyers enjoy family financial

backing required to earn a degree and experience abroad to ensure employment in the Colombian business sector. Lawyers in the corporate or business law sector are considered to be highly successful and are held in high esteem by Colombian society. Lawyers in the traditional sector, because of their lack of pay and background, are regarded as marginal and failures.<sup>54</sup>

Economically, drug dollars are a prime contributor to mounting inflation, spiraling land and real estate values, reduced legitimate exports, and cutbacks in government spending for sorely needed development projects. The influx of drug dollars has caused balance of payment problems at a time of weakening coffee export earnings, placing tremendous pressures on Colombia.<sup>55</sup> These drug dollars caused the reevaluation of the Colombian peso, making Colombian exports more costly in the international market. The costlier Colombian exports are, the less desirable they become to foreign traders. This lessens Colombian exports sales and negatively affects Colombia's ability

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<sup>54</sup>. Judith Goode, "Lawyers in Colombia", Human Organization, Vol 29 (Spring, 1970), 70-80.

<sup>55</sup>. Latin American Monitor, September, 1989, 671.

to earn foreign exchange.

Socially, illicit drug earnings have created a new dominant class, outside of government control, that has bough and bullied its way into the nation's class-conscious society. Most importantly, drug trafficker mores and money have corrupted the very fabric of Colombian society at all levels in ways unacceptable to the average citizen, who might otherwise generally accept corruption as perfectly normal. Substance abuse has caused an explosion of drug-related health problems in all levels of Colombian society. PROMETEO, the first drug rehabilitation center in Bogota, reports that each of the past five years has seen an increase of approximately one thousand additional persons seeking medical relief for their drug habit.<sup>56</sup>

The main complaints are drug addiction to cocaine and basuco (coca paste mixed with tobacco and smoked). According to PROMETEO, patients come from all levels of society.<sup>57</sup> At \$1.50 US a gram, basuco is available to people of all ages and backgrounds. The growing drug addiction problem has begun to tax the health system,

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<sup>56</sup>. El Tiempo, 15 October, 1988.

<sup>57</sup>. Ibid.

which has a limited capacity to handle the influx of addicted people. The government itself has limited resources to aid in combating this growing drug addiction problem.

The accumulating effect of the drug problem's effects on the politico-socio-economic structure of Colombia has driven the government to establish peace with the M-19 so that it can be free to pursue the drug problem. The drug problem's debilitating effect on the whole of Colombian society is the basis for the government's immediate response to the M-19's demand that paramilitary groups be dismantled prior to its engaging in meaningful negotiations. In mid-April, 1989 the government suspended Law 48 of 1968.<sup>58</sup> This law had authorized the use of civilian personnel "in activities and tasks for the re-establishment of normality".<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the law had empowered the Defense Ministry to issue combat weapons to private citizens and to organize these citizens into regional self-defense groups similar to the Civil Indigenous Defense Groups (CIDGs) organized in Vietnam by the U.S.

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58. Latin American Regional Report, June 1989, 4.

59. Ibid.

Army during the Vietnam war to defend against the Viet Cong.<sup>60</sup>

What makes the government's position stronger than the M-19's is that in refitting and modernizing its military into a more effective fighting force for combatting the drug cartels, it also imbues the military with greater counterinsurgency capabilities. Consequently, the government has a strong position from which to negotiate, forcing the M-19 into a "do or die" situation. Nevertheless, the government cannot afford to construct an impossible situation for the M-19. It must make real overtures to the M-19 to keep the peace process alive, in light of the ongoing fierce drug war.

The drug cartels' strategy had a detrimental effect on the M-19 and its demands in the 1989 peace negotiations with the government. In these talks the M-19's position was based on one overriding prerequisite, that in order to move forward in the peace process the government must first dismantle all private armies and other paramilitary groups.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup>. U.S. Army, Counter guerrilla Operations (Wash,DC., 1978), 17.

<sup>61</sup>. Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report No.2, 1989.



government's response to this demand has been to order a crackdown on these paramilitary groups.<sup>62</sup> The crackdown, in conjunction with continuing U.S. counterinsurgency and anti-drug efforts, eroded the drug cartels' operational security network and forced them to take drastic measures to protect their interests. The response was open warfare on all belligerents: the M-19, the government, the banking sector, the U.S. government, the media, and society in general.

The objective of this warfare was two-fold. First, it sought to create and maintain an atmosphere of instability that would cause the government to retract its anti-drug efforts, thereby lessening its direct threat to the drug cartels. Additionally, such a retraction by the government had the potential for causing massive political problems. Secondly, it was geared to wreak the most inhumane and senseless death and destruction upon Colombia as a nation. The Medellin drug cartel believed that such a reign of terror would propel the Colombian government to seek a negotiated settlement to the drug war.

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62. Ibid.

### COLOMBIAN MILITARY

The Colombian Army has been the principle element in the Colombian military's counterinsurgency efforts.<sup>63</sup> In the past the Army served as the leading element in the government's anti-drug effort. In more current times the government assigned primary responsibility to the Army due to the drug cartels' private armies' enhanced combat capabilities. This additional combat role presented the Army with a dual tactical situation for which it lacked the operational flexibility and sustainment of operations required for success on the battlefield.

The Army's inadequacies to respond effectively to this dual-fronted war were a significant weakness. Its record of success in the twenty-plus years of fighting the Colombian insurgency had been marginal. Only since 1985 or so did it become truly effective against the M-19 and other guerrilla groups. Continued U.S. counterinsurgency training and support and the government's modernization program increased the Army's effectiveness, reducing the need for force multipliers

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<sup>63</sup>. Herman, Democracy in Latin America, 229.

such as the regional self-defense groups. The government's suspension of Law 48 did not hinder the Army's counterinsurgency capabilities.

The Army thus came to enjoy substantial powers in the struggle against the guerrillas, and in its own financial and organizational matters.<sup>64</sup> It has no desire to take complete governmental power and to thus risk a total political breakdown. The Army is keenly aware of the risks of direct exercise of government and the limits of political rule.<sup>65</sup> In light of this understanding, the Army has supported the civil administration's peace negotiations in spite of the loss of power such as the suspension of Law 48 and overtures to the M-19.

The Army stands to gain substantially from the peace process. A firm peace pact would eliminate one front in the present day conflict while the Army would receive added hardware and support packages from the U.S. for the anti-drug effort. This U.S. assistance would enhance counterinsurgency capabilities as well.

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<sup>64</sup>. Alain Rouque, The Military and the State in Latin America, translated by Paul E. Sigmund (Berkeley, 1987), 215.

<sup>65</sup>. Ibid.

A substantive peace would also lessen the problems of dissent and corruption within the army. Army members of all ranks openly voiced their disillusion with fighting an enemy (guerrilla groups) whose critical attitude toward Colombian society many of them share.<sup>66</sup> These disillusioned Army members believe they are victims of the state's policy of giving the Army the thankless task of making up "with fire and sword" for the inability of the system to provide a minimum of social justice.<sup>67</sup>

During the early 1960's Major General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, Minister of War, conceived and implemented a counterinsurgency plan named "Plan Lazo". Ruiz made military civic action an important integral part of the plan. At the same time Ruiz was critical of the civil administration for relying on military action to deal with the insurgency and for not implementing social reforms to lessen anti-government guerrilla action. In the 1970's General Alvaro Valencia Tovar and Defense Minister Abraham Varon Valencia openly advocated widespread social reforms as the best means of

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<sup>66</sup>. Ibid, 217.

<sup>67</sup>. Ibid.

eliminating popular resistance to the government.<sup>68</sup>

Each one of these individuals was forced into retirement for their actions and beliefs.

In 1981 Army Commander General Fernando Landazabal Reyes expressed deep concern about a prolonged battle against subversion and the need for socioeconomic and political changes.<sup>69</sup>

General Landazabal stated: "Subversion survives, with greater strength than before, and with the souls of patriotic and loyal soldiers, we have the vague premonition of worse days to come. We are convinced that the army can militarily destroy the guerrillas, but we are also convinced that...this subversion will continue as long as the objective and subjective conditions in the economic, social, and political fields, which daily impair and disrupt stability, are not modified."<sup>70</sup>

Army leaders feared such disillusionment could spread throughout the ranks, severely undermining discipline and order.

Most importantly, the Army feared a total breakdown of political order through continued guerrilla warfare and a protracted drug war. The Army has always played

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68. Herman, Democracy in Latin America, 231.

69. Herman, Democracy in Latin America, 232.

70. Revista Militar del Ejercito, April 1, 1981.

an essential and decisive role of defender of Colombia's traditional two-party system.<sup>71</sup> This two-party system has traditionally eliminated political alternatives through cooptation or by closing every legal avenue to the outsider. When threatened, the parties have always used the Army as a last recourse. The Army's own survival, as an autonomous entity in relation to the power of the parties, is in turn based on the continuance of the present constitutional form of government. Virtually all aspects of Colombian military life are regulated by constitutional law. The constitution provides for the establishment of a permanent army. Statutory and decree laws regulate in detail the recruitment, assignment, training, promotions, retirement, compensation, and discipline of military personnel.<sup>72</sup> When disputes arise over the enforcement of military rights and duties, they are adjudicated by both military and civilian tribunals. Combined, these regulating parameters provide for strong civilian control of the army but provides it a

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<sup>71</sup>. Rouque, The Military and the State, 213.

<sup>72</sup>. Mark J. Ruhl, "Civil-Military Relations in Colombia", JIAS, Vol 27 (May, 1981), 123-146.

structured permanency.

### THE UNITED STATES: Friend or Foe?

It seems improbable that the United States would play a derailing role in Colombia's peace process with the M-19. After all, the United States has provided the lead in counterinsurgency efforts in Latin America since the 1960s.<sup>73</sup> Yet the United States' current anti-drug strategy threatens to destabilize the peace process between the Colombian government and the M-19. There are several ways in which the United States' anti-drug strategy poses this threat to the peace process. Among the most important ways are the internationalization of the United States drug war, the use of economic influence, and the military aspect of the strategy. In addition to these problematic (problematic for Colombia) aspects of the United States' anti-drug strategy is the United States' lack of understanding for the underlaying reasons for Colombia's all-out war on the drug cartels and their surrogates. First, though, the United States' anti-drug strategy and reasons for its recent modifications must be detailed.

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<sup>73</sup>. U.S. Army, Counter guerrilla, 74.



The United States has been concerned with the penetration of its society by illicit drugs since after the turn of the century. Opiates, marijuana, hashish, synthetics, cocaine, and others have all at one time or another been deemed by the United States government to be a threat to the country in general. U.S. government administrations have all dealt with these illicit drugs in one manner or another. The major difference has been the degree of importance and priority placed on the drug-related problems in relation to other pressing problems of national concern. The current U.S. administration has declared cocaine to be the root of the majority of American social ills. As President Bush recently stated "There is no question that drugs are the quicksand of our entire society".<sup>74</sup> President Bush thus made the war on illicit drugs the nation's top priority.

President Bush established the United States' first-ever national strategy to fight narcotics.<sup>75</sup> The anti-drug strategy, detailed in the government's "National Drug Control Strategy" document, provides

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<sup>74</sup>. Times of the Americas, 9.

<sup>75</sup>. Ibid.

increased funding on all fronts, including:

- a 118 percent increase, to \$1.6 billion, for prison construction, including some military-style "boot camp" facilities.
- a 133 percent increase, to \$350 million, for state and local law enforcement agencies.
- a 25 percent increase, to \$1.2 billion, for education and prevention.
- a 53 percent increase, to \$925 million for treatment.
- a requirement for schools and colleges to implement drug-free programs to qualify for federal funds.<sup>76</sup>

All of this funding is for use in fighting the drug wars within the United States, which has nothing to do with Colombia's drug wars or its peace processes. But Bush's strategy provides the basis for the internationalization of the United States' war on illicit drug trafficking. It is the contention of the Bush administration that the national anti-drug plan will only work with successful drug trafficking

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<sup>76</sup>. National Drug Control Strategy (Wash. DC, 1989).

points, and through eradication.<sup>77</sup> The idea of interdiction and other anti-drug activities in the international arena is not new. Since the passage of the 1914 Harrison Narcotics Law U.S. presidents and administrations have wrestled with domestic control of illicit drugs and pursuit of a viable narcotic foreign policy.<sup>78</sup>

Within the context of its federal anti-narcotic activity the United States has encouraged Latin America to participate in the larger, international campaign against narcotics.<sup>79</sup> But the central point of this larger, international anti-drug campaign has been primarily to reduce the availability of illicit drugs in American society. Efforts in this international campaign have usually placed a burden on the participating countries. In Colombia's case it is the extradition treaty between the U.S. and Colombian governments for use in bringing Colombian drug cartel members to face U.S. justice.

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77. Ibid.

78. William O. Walker III, Drug Control in the Americas (Albuquerque, 1981), 37.

79. Ibid.

The extradition treaty has caused deep divisions among Colombian politicians. The treaty is viewed by a sizeable portion of Colombians as an American infringement upon Colombian sovereignty. Although this extradition treaty is in place to aid both the U.S. and Colombia in their wars against drugs, it has raised a furor of nationalistic outcry in all quarters of Colombian society. It is one of the main concerns of the M-19 in its quest for peace. The Medellin drug cartel has been successful, in the past, in striking down the extradition treaty as unconstitutional. In 1984, then President Betancur went through extremely difficult times because of the Medellin drug cartel's efforts to nullify the extradition treaty. During his tenure as president Colombia suffered its first drug war with the drug cartels. President Barco has been engaged in the fiercest drug war to date, with the United States urging him to fight harder.

Barco has agreed to maintain the extradition treaty. Why does he do so if it is viewed as an infringement on Colombian sovereignty? Is it because not to do so provides an opening or opportunity for unilateral military action by the United States? This

possibility of U.S. military intervention is of great concern for Barco. The United States has demonstrated that it stands ready to do just that wherever it deems necessary. The invasion of Panama is now the prime example of this U.S. willingness to resort to military force. But military force is not the only weapon in the United States' arsenal for fighting the anti-drug war. The United States has quietly been exerting economic pressure on Colombia to accept the United States' plan and advice on fighting an anti-drug war.

Colombia's primary export is coffee. This one product accounts for 50 percent of Colombia's legal export earnings.<sup>80</sup> In July of 1989 the United States caused the breakdown of the International Coffee Agreement. The International Coffee Agreement was a device used by coffee producing countries and major coffee purchasing countries (US as a major member) for price and export quotas adjustments in the international market. For countries such as Colombia which depend heavily on coffee exports for foreign exchange earnings, the breakdown of the agreement was

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<sup>80</sup>. Vinod Thomas, Linking Macroeconomic and Agricultural Policies for Adjustment with Growth: The Colombian Experience (Baltimore, 1985), 9.

disasterous.

The United States withdrew support for the International Coffee Agreement when it complained to the coffee-producing countries that it (US) would no longer tolerate these countries selling coffee to non-member countries at cut-rate prices.<sup>81</sup> The breakdown of this agreement had a devastating effect on Colombia's economy at a time when it was engaged in a war for its survival. What is so ludicrous is that now the United States is offering economic assistance to Colombia, along with new hope for a renewal of the International Coffee Agreement.

#### Drug Wars: American and Colombian

The United States is currently engaged in two drug wars. One drug war is the fight against consumption. The second drug war is interdiction at the borders and, now more aggressively, in the international arena. Colombia is engaged in a multitude of drug wars and drug-related wars. These include:

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<sup>81</sup>. Times of the Americas, December 27, 1989.

- the drug cartels' war against the Colombian judicial system.
- the war between the drug cartels and the political left (Union Patriotica, Communist Party), with the political left suffering the greater losses in this war.
- the war between the drug cartels and the traditional elite.
- the war between the drug cartels and the FARC-EP guerrilla group.
- indiscriminate attacks of the ELN guerrilla group upon local administrators, government agencies, and attacks on economic targets such as oil pipelines. The ELN seeks to incorporate the M-19's old areas of operations and influence.

Obviously, the United States does not face a problem of the same magnitude as Colombia. Herein lies the United States' lack of understanding Colombia's current situation. President Bush's national strategy includes \$2 billion over the next five years to help crush South American cocaine cartels.<sup>82</sup> These funds are in addition to the \$261 million that Colombia,

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<sup>82</sup>. Times of the Americas, December 27, 1989.

Peru, and Bolivia are due to receive this fiscal year.<sup>83</sup> According to federal anti-drug czar William Bennett, the additional financial aid to these countries will be contingent, in part, on performance (specifically gains) in fighting cocaine trafficking. The gist of the United States' solution to the drug problem in Latin America, and thereby a solution to the U.S.' own drug problem, is that a high influx of dollars on this problem will solve it by encouraging the front line countries to intensify their fight, with more money as reward for their efforts. This is a slap in the face of Colombia. Colombia is not fighting its anti-drug war simply to appease the United States or to be rewarded with money. Colombia is fighting for its survival.

In August, 1989 President Barco launched Colombia's anti-drug war after the assassination of Galan. This war came on the heels of the breakdown of the secret negotiations between Barco's administration and the Medellin cartel. The assassination of Senator Galan introduced a new kind or type of violence into Colombia's crisis. It was a direct attack on the

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<sup>83</sup>. Ibid.



selection process for Colombia's most powerful political office, the presidency. Furthermore, it threatened to broaden the scope of violence in Colombia.

Galan's assassination was reminiscent of the assassination of Jorge Gaitan in 1948. Gaitan, the jefe unico of the Liberal political party, was a candidate for the 1950 presidential elections. His assassination sparked the bloody Bogotazo riot which laid waste to central Bogota. The Bogotazo contributed to the disruption of the Colombian political process and to the period of political violence known as La Violencia. The memory of this tragic period of Colombian history is still vivid in the minds of Colombians today. Galan's assassination had the potential of igniting mass violence similar in intensity to the Bogotazo.

Such mass violence, coupled with the ongoing internal wars would definitely spell the end of Colombia as a nation. President Barco responded in the only manner he could. He resorted to extreme violent measures against the drug cartel in order to prevent mass violence. Colombia thus needs no incentives from

the United States to fight its drug wars. What the country needs, in order to at least reduce the level of violence in all sectors, is less foreign penetration and pressure on the handling of its internal affairs. Any U.S. action that hints of infringement upon Colombian sovereignty will further deteriorate the political situation in Colombia. The United States' invasion of Panama and the sailing of a U.S. carrier group toward Colombia's caribbean coast renewed fears of U.S. subversion of Colombia. The latter action caused a flurry of anti-American outcrys from all sides in the Colombian government and society.

The United States' actions have contributed to Colombia's reordering its priorities in dealing with its national problems. The peace process with M-19 has been placed on the backburner by Barco. This changing of priorities by the Colombian government made the M-19 drop the extradition treaty plebiscite as a prerequisite for lasting peace.<sup>84</sup> The M-19 has little choice but to make overtures to redirect the government's attention to the peace process. The Colombian government has become so totally focused in

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<sup>84</sup>. El Tiempo, January 15, 1990.

fighting for its survival that it may drop the peace process as a priority altogether. The United States needs to review its strategy on the international anti-drug campaign to avert being a destructive force to those countries which are truly on the front lines of this massive and complex war.

As one American custom official stated recently "What they've (Colombians) accomplished in Colombia is having a major impact. What we (Americans) have to do is tighten it up everywhere."<sup>85</sup> President Bush participated in a drug summit with the leaders of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia in Cartagena, Colombia on February 15, 1990, and carried with him a U.S. military interdiction plan involving a radar net within the borders of these countries. The radar installations were to be equipped, supervised, and manned by U.S. military personnel. President Bush's insistence on the acceptance of this U.S. military interdiction plan in whole by these countries carried the potential of derailing the summit's goal of presenting a united international front against the drug cartels. Bush's military interdiction plan was soundly turned down by

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<sup>85</sup>. Cox News Service, February 12, 1990.

Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. The negative connotations of the plan made acceptance an impossibility. National sovereignty was at stake for these countries. In Colombia, such an acceptance of the plan could have caused further violence and effectively disrupt the government's peace process with the M-19, that which the government can least afford.

### CONCLUSION

With the signing of the peace pact in October, 1989, Colombia gained a fragile peace between the M-19 and the government. Founded in the midst of the current drug war, this peace was immediately put to the test by the drug cartels' terrorist campaign against the government. This terrorist campaign threatened to break the peace pact between the M-19 and the Colombian government. It, in fact, stalled the peace pact proceedings in their final hour. The M-19 postponed turning over its weapons to the government. Their concern is the heightening violence in all quarters of the country. Colombia is caught up in a vicious circle of conflicting, correlated issues. A weakening economy, the drug wars, poverty, guerrilla warfare, and political discontent are issues impinging simultaneously on the government.

The future of peace between the government and the guerrillas is doubtful for two significant reasons. First, the drug cartels' present actions may well disrupt this newly found peace. The Medellin drug cartel has surpassed, by a wide margin, the M-19 as the

source of the greatest danger to the nation. It has the resources, capabilities, and audacity and willingness to strike out at the government with impunity. Secondly, the conditions that give life to the insurgency still exist with little hope of change. In order to gain a substantial lasting peace the government must address the issues of poverty, rural neglect, and the maldistribution of income. It must make significant inroads in reducing these disparities. Only through progress in these areas can the government lessen discontent and the recourse to armed conflict.

The irony of Colombia's situation is that to overcome the drug problem the government must address the same issues it needs to address in eliminating the insurgency. Poverty and destitution make for an available and willing source of labor for the drug cartels. The single most effective manner to address these issues is through a genuine political openness at all levels of the political system. Yet such political openness can occur best in a politically and socially stable environment.

Such is the vicious circle of conflicting issues that Colombia desperately seeks to break out of. Peace

with the M-19 and other guerrilla groups is a first step. Success in maintaining this peace in the face of the continuing drug war will determine its future. For now, Colombia stands at the crossroads of peace, ruthless repression, and lebanonistic fractionalization.

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